

JERRY TODD
AND THE
BUFFALO BILL
BATHTUB

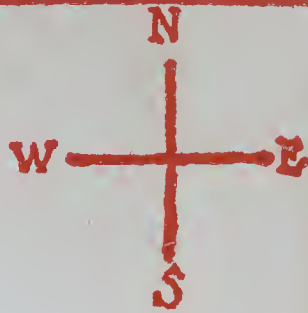


BY LEO EDWARDS



MAP OF

Road to Ashtown →



Depot

Chicago and Rock Island R.R.

Street

Poppy's
Plekle
Parlor.

Street

Factory district

Main

Street

Old
Carriage factory

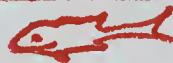
School Street

Tutter
Times

Jewelry
store

Poppy's
home

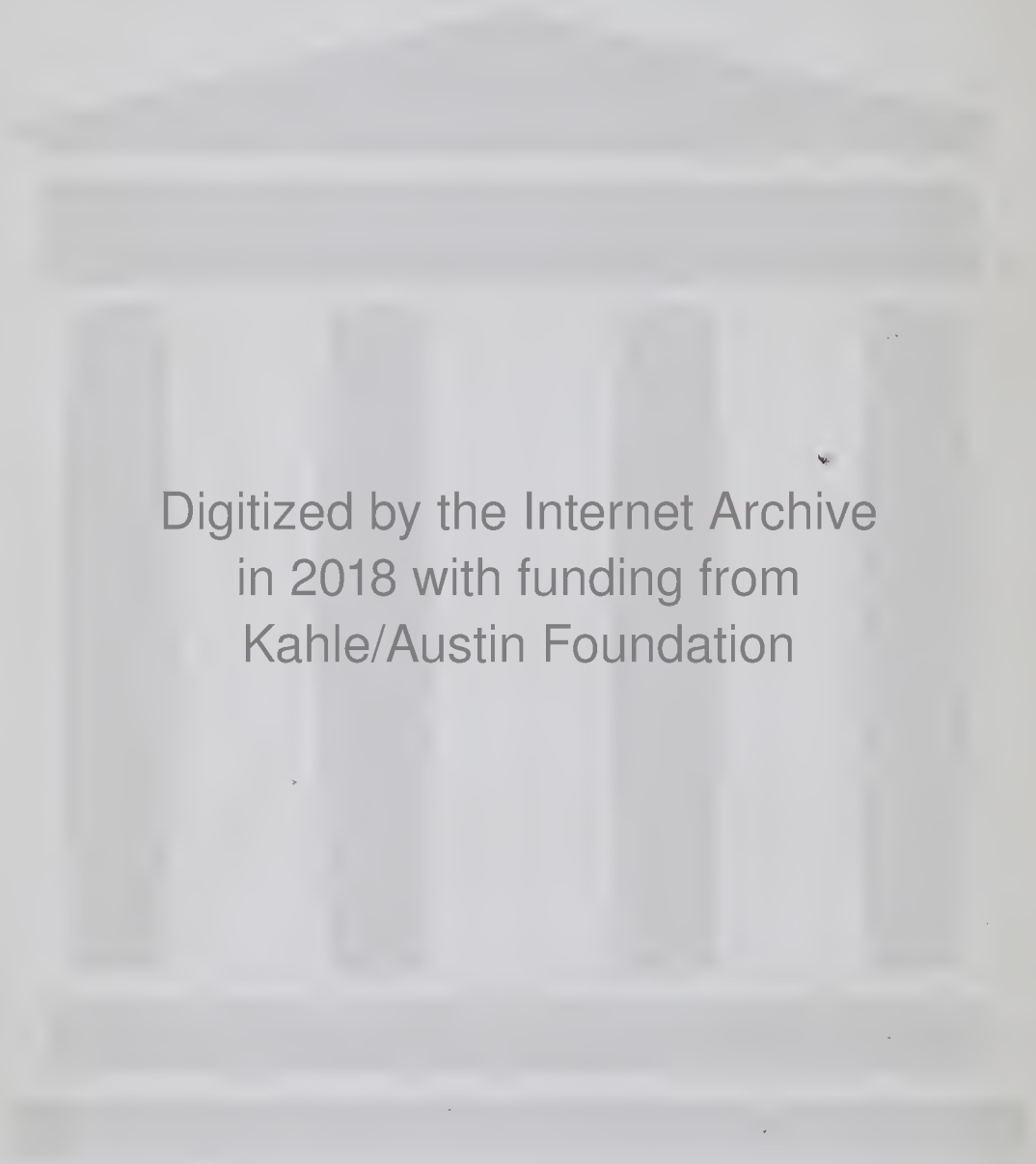
Canal



To Ashtown →



TUTTER ILLINOIS



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**JERRY TODD AND THE
BUFFALO BILL BATHTUB**

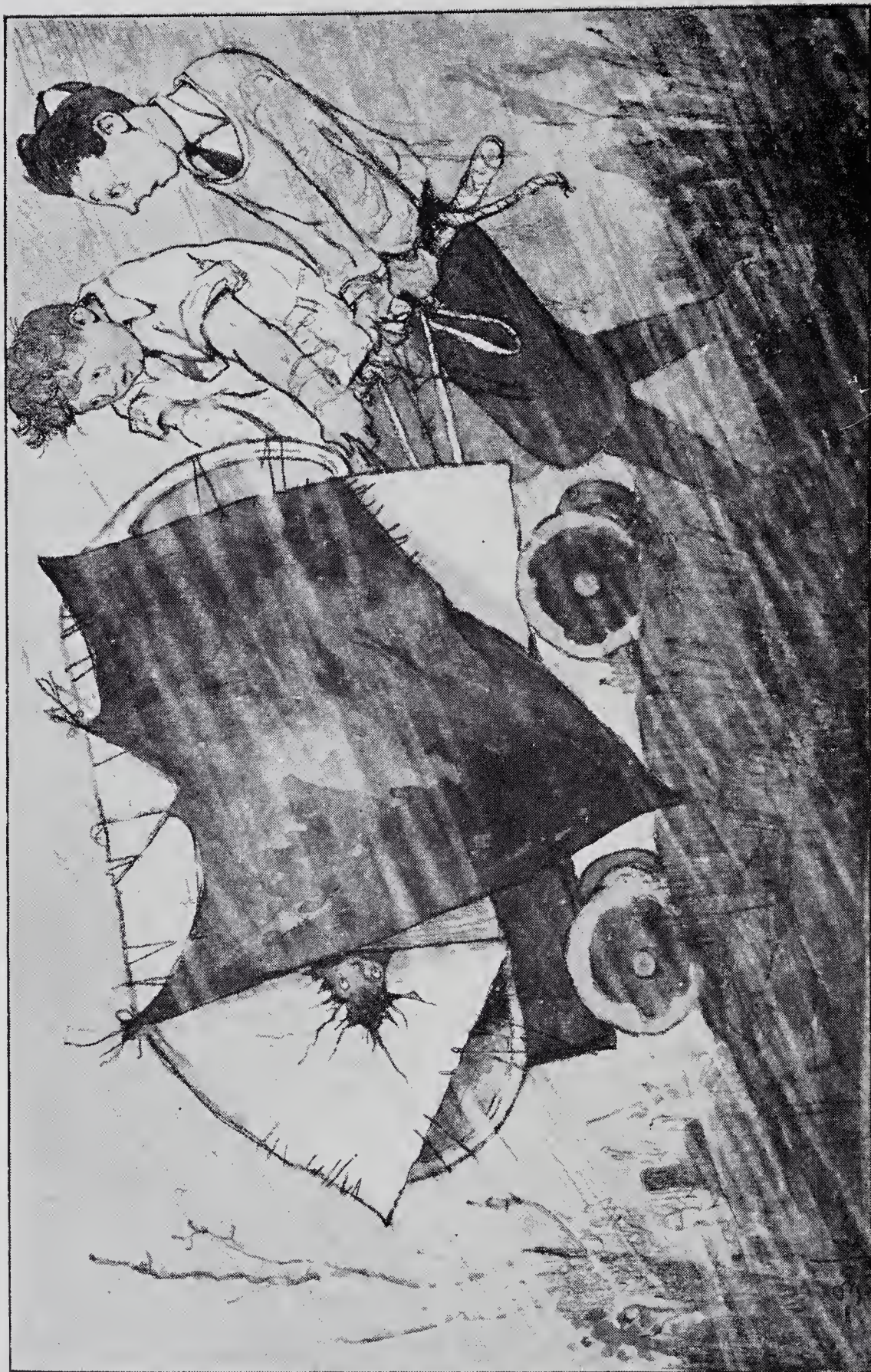
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THE PULLING GOT HARDER AND HARDER.

Jerry Todd and the Buffalo Bill Bathrub

Frontispiece (Page 7)

JERRY TODD AND THE BUFFALO BILL BATHTUB

By
LEO EDWARDS

AUTHOR OF
THE JERRY TODD BOOKS
THE POPPY OTT BOOKS
THE TUFFY BEAN BOOKS
THE ANDY BLAKE BOOKS

ILLUSTRATED BY
BERT SALG

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LEO EDWARDS' BOOKS

Here is a list of Leo Edward's
published books:

THE JERRY TODD SERIES

JERRY TODD AND THE WHISPERING MUMMY
JERRY TODD AND THE ROSE-COLORED CAT
JERRY TODD AND THE OAK ISLAND TREASURE
JERRY TODD AND THE WALTZING HEN
JERRY TODD AND THE TALKING FROG
JERRY TODD AND THE PURRING EGG
JERRY TODD IN THE WHISPERING CAVE
JERRY TODD, PIRATE
JERRY TODD AND THE BOB-TAILED ELEPHANT
JERRY TODD, EDITOR-IN-GRIEF
JERRY TODD, CAVEMAN
JERRY TODD AND THE FLYING FLAPDOODLE
JERRY TODD AND THE BUFFALO BILL BATHTUB

THE POPPY OTT SERIES

POPPY OTT AND THE STUTTERING PARROT
POPPY OTT'S SEVEN-LEAGUE STILTS
POPPY OTT AND THE GALLOPING SNAIL
POPPY OTT'S PEDIGREED PICKLES
POPPY OTT AND THE FRECKLED GOLDFISH
POPPY OTT AND THE TITTERING TOTEM
POPPY OTT AND THE PRANCING PANCAKE
POPPY OTT HITS THE TRAIL

THE TUFFY BEAN SERIES

TUFFY BEAN'S PUPPY DAYS
TUFFY BEAN'S ONE-RING CIRCUS
TUFFY BEAN AT FUNNY-BONE FARM
TUFFY BEAN AND THE LOST FORTUNE

THE ANDY BLAKE SERIES

ANDY BLAKE
ANDY BLAKE'S COMET COASTER
ANDY BLAKE'S SECRET SERVICE
ANDY BLAKE AND THE POT OF GOLD

JERRY TODD AND THE BUFFALO BILL BATHTUB

CHAPTER I

THE OLD BATHTUB

It's funny how ideas pop into a fellow's head.

When I went out in the country that morning to the town dump-pile, which is about a mile from town, I never thought I'd come home with an idea like *that*. But, for that matter, I never expected to find a bathtub either.

But there it was—with a lot of tin cans and other junk wedged in around it. I had to pull like the dickens to get it loose. And it was then that the idea of putting wheels on it popped into my head.

And why not? The Tutter barber made money selling baths. So why couldn't I?

Gee! The more I thought about it the more excited I got. As I told my chum, Red Meyers, who was there with me, if we could sell one hundred baths a week, at twenty-five cents

apiece, that would be twenty-five dollars. Which was a lot of money for two kids to earn in one week.

But Red didn't think the idea was so hot at first.

"I never heard of anybody putting wheels on a bathtub," says he, as he scratched his freckled nose.

"Anyway," says I, as I gave the bathtub another tug, "let's get it on my coaster wagon and haul it home."

It was an old-fashioned tub with a tin bottom and wooden rim. So it wasn't so very heavy. And by lifting together we could move it around just as easy as anything. Someone in Tutter had thrown it out, I guess, to put in a new one. But there wasn't anything the matter with it, except that it needed painting. There wasn't a crack in it, or anything. And I knew I could fix it up swell when I got it home.

"And do you really think," says Red, as we balanced the tub on the coaster wagon and started off, "that you can sell baths like you said?"

"The Tutter barber does it," says I. "For I saw his sign in his window. It says—baths, twenty-five cents."

"But that's for men, isn't it?" quizzed Red.

“Yes—I don’t think the barber sells many baths to kids,” I admitted. “But I bet we can.”

Red grinned impishly.

“Gee!” says he. “Twenty-five cents a bath! Boy!—you wouldn’t catch *me* paying twenty-five cents for a bath—not if I could get around where there were some gumdrops first.”

“But, Red,” I argued, “what’d happen at your house if your bathtub got clogged up and you couldn’t use it?”

“I’d celebrate,” says he.

“Sure,” says I, “I believe you would. But what’d your ma do?—tell me that.”

“Oh,” he shrugged, sort of indifferent-like, “I suppose she’d fuss around.”

“Sure she would,” I nodded vigorously. “And don’t you think either that she’d let you off. For if the bathtub didn’t work, she’d probably make you wash in the kitchen sink.”

That set him to grinning again. And if you could have seen him then, with that big mouth of his stretching from ear to ear, and his eyes dancing, you’d better understand why I like him so well.

“But I couldn’t get in the kitchen sink,” he snorted. “Why, you dumb cluck, I’d hang over on all sides.”

“Well,” I gave in, “maybe you wouldn’t get washed in the kitchen sink. But you’d get washed in something, I can tell you that much. For I know your ma. She’s just like my ma when it comes to finding dirt. And she’d never let you go dirty. She’d find some way to clean you up.”

He nodded gloomily.

“I guess you’re right, Jerry,” says he. “Mothers are all alike.”

“I know blamed well I’m right,” says I. “And that’s why I say, let’s take the bathtub home and rent it out. For there’s good money in it.”

He showed more interest then.

“And when some kid’s bathtub gets clogged up, we’re going to rent him our bathtub, huh?” says he, with growing enthusiasm.

“Well,” I countered, “wouldn’t your ma rent it, if you got all ready to take a bath, and the plug wouldn’t stick, or something?”

He laughed merrily.

“Well, she’d make me wash, all right. There’s no two ways about that.”

I was glad I had him won over. For he and I had been close pals for years. And it would be more fun if we could work together. Besides, I wanted him to let me fix up the bathtub

in his barn, where we'd have plenty of room.

We were still a good half-mile from town. And up ahead of us was a long sandy hill.

"Let's get Horse Foot to help us," says I.

"Yes," says Red, "you find him if you can."

"But where did he go to?" says I, looking around. "He was here a minute ago."

"Where does he always go to," says Red, disgusted, "when there's some work to do?"

Horse Foot, you'll remember, is the little kid who helped me out of the dead chest in my "Flying Flapdoodle" book. We call him Horse Foot because he always pokes along behind, as though his feet weighed a ton apiece. I wouldn't have him in my gang at all if he didn't live next door to me. But you can't very well keep a kid out of your gang when he lives *that* close—especially if he's any kind of a kid at all.

His full name is Samuel Horace Butterfield Rail. Some name, huh? His ma calls him her little "sunbeam." And to hear her tell it he's the smartest thing that ever walked around on two legs. But you'll have a chance to judge for yourself how smart he is, as I go on with my story.

On top of stuttering, he's built like a stuffed sofa pillow with a string tied around it. And

he has about as much expression to his fat moon-like face as a petrified clam. He can say the craziest things. He says whatever happens to be in his mind. One time at school when he was thinking about his breakfast the teacher asked him who discovered America, and he said "pancakes."

Now, Red and I almost yelled our heads off to get him, as we needed him. But he was nowhere around. Or if he was he kept still. So finally we went on, grumbling.

"I can see Grandma Carey's kitchen chimney," says Red, as we got closer to the hill.

"Where?" says I.

"Up there on top of the hill—through the trees. Don't you see it?" he pointed.

"I bet that's where Horse Foot is," says I. "For he's always hanging around her."

It was a cool October day. And we both wore heavy sweaters. But we took them off after a bit. And even then it was hot pulling. For the sand was ankle deep.

We had started out that morning to find an old heating stove. For Red's pa had told us that we could build a club-room in his haymow. And, of course, you can't get much good out of a club-room in the winter time if you don't have a stove.

Scoop Ellery and Peg Shaw had promised to go with us. But they never showed up at the appointed time. So we went on without them, deciding that about the best place to look for an old stove was on the town dump-pile. And then, just before we got there, who should pop up behind us but that crazy Horse Foot.

Scoop and Peg, you know, are old pals of mine. We were all born in Tutter, where we go to school and Sunday-school. But there wasn't any school to-day, for this was Saturday.

Scoop's pa runs a grocery store. Peg's pa puts on wall-paper and paints houses. They're both swell kids. My own pa runs a brickyard. And Red's pa runs a picture theatre. We all live within a few blocks of each other in the *best* little town in Illinois—good old Tutter! So now, I guess, you know all about us.

The pulling got harder and harder. So finally I stopped.

“Wough!” I panted. “That old tub's plenty heavy, even if it is made of tin.”

“It won't pull so hard,” says Red, “when we get to the top of the hill. For there's a better road there.” Then he asked, “But where are you going to get the wheels for it, Jerry?”

“Off an old buggy, or something.”

“But I didn’t know you were going to use wheels that big,” says he. “I thought you meant little coaster-wagon wheels—to go on the corners of the tub.”

“We’ve got to have a bath-house too,” says I. “And we can’t build stuff like that on little bits of wheels. I’ve got it all pictured in my mind. And we’ll paint it up slick, with a sign on it.”

“Telling what it is, huh?”

“Yes—something like this: Hey, kids!—call us up when you need a bath—only twenty-five cents, soap and scouring powder free. . . . And after that we’ll put our names.”

“Jerry Todd and Red Meyers? Or just Todd and Meyers—which?”

“No, something more businesslike—the Tutter Portable Bathtub Company, or something like that. Something that sounds big and important, like General Electric Company.”

Red’s eyes were shining now.

“Boy!” says he. “We sure were lucky to find that old bathtub. And I bet when we get it fixed up, the kids’ll be crazy over it too.”

“Sure they will,” says I confidently. “Instead of growling over a bath, they’ll want to take one every day.”

“And we can have double rates,” planned Red. “Twenty-five cents for one kid, or two for thirty-five cents—and let ’em splash all they want to. They’ll like it better that way, if they can have fun.”

“Sure thing,” I agreed quickly. “We’ll make the old bath-house good and strong, so they won’t smash it.”

“And three kids for fifty cents,” Red further planned.

“We mustn’t take too many at a time,” I argued, “or they won’t be able to get in the tub.”

Here our attention was drawn to the darkening sky by a loud rumble. There was a splattering of rain too, with the promise of a whole lot more in a moment or two.

That wasn’t any place for us to get soaked—out there in the country. So we started for the hill on the run, with the old bathtub bobbing along behind us. Boy!—that *was* a pull! But we finally made it, clear to the top.

The thunder was booming to beat the cars now. Just like powder kegs going off. And the rain came down harder than ever. So we left the bathtub at the top of the hill and legged it for Grandma Carey’s house as fast as we could go.

There never was a nicer old lady anywhere than Grandma Carey. Nor a prettier one either, let me tell you. For she has the prettiest white hair. It's almost as white as snow, with little crinkles in it. And her eyes are just like a blue summer sky.

And how those eyes can twinkle when she has a bunch of lively boys around her! For she's crazy over boys—that is, the right kind of boys. And that's why we all call her Grandma—because she's so kind to us.

She raises geese and garden truck for a living, on a little patch of ground just outside of town. She lives all alone. And often in the summer time, when I haven't anything else to do, I go out to her house and help her. So I knew it would be all right for us to run in on her now out of the rain.

“Dear me!” says she, meeting us in the kitchen door. “Were you boys out in all that rain?”

“We got some of it,” says Red, shaking the water from his cap.

“Well, don't stand out there, Donald, in the wet. Come inside by the kitchen fire. And you too, Jerry.”

She took our wet sweaters and hung them on a line behind her old-fashioned cook stove.

“There!” says she. “They’ll dry in a jiffy there. And your feet’ll soon dry too, if you put them in the oven.”

I kept looking around for Horse Foot. But he was nowhere in sight. And when I asked Grandma Carey if he had been there, she shook her head.

“Did I see you boys pulling something up the hill?” she inquired.

“An old bathtub,” I told her. “Someone in Tutter bought a better one, I guess, and threw the old one away, on the town dump-pile.”

We were still sitting there, with our feet in the oven, and our sweaters steaming behind us, when a faint knock came.

“I bet a cookie that’s Horse Foot now,” I told Red.

Sure enough it was! And when he came in, all I could think of was a drowned rat. Boy, was he wet!

“Where in Sam Hill have you been?” I asked him.

“In the b-b-bathtub,” he chattered. For he was shivering all over.

Grandma Carey started to undress him beside the stove.

“Maybe you’d better help me, Jerry,” says she. “And then we’ll wrap him in a wool blanket.”

“Br-r-r!” chattered Horse Foot, as I pulled his wet pants off.

“The poor child!” cried Grandma Carey. “Just look at him shiver.”

“Well, you better let me finish him up,” I suggested. “And when I get him undressed I’ll rub him with a towel.”

“Yes, take this towel and rub him good. And while you’re doing that,” she started off, “I’ll run upstairs and get him a blanket.”

Red took the wet clothes to the sink to wring them out.

“Gosh!” says he, as he started the water running down the drain pipe. “You’d think they came out of a tub.”

“They d-d-did,” chattered Horse Foot.

“Did what?” says I, as I went over him briskly with the towel.

“Come out of a t-t-tub,” says he.

I gave him a sharp look.

“Say, what’d you mean when you said you were in the bathtub?” I asked him. “You didn’t dump it off our wagon out there, did you?”

“N-n-no, I was in it. I c-c-crawled in it when you and Red were p-p-pullin’ it.”

Red suddenly stopped wringing and I stopped rubbing. And there we stood, open-mouthed.

“Do you mean to tell us,” squawked Red, “that you crawled in that bathtub behind our back, and let us pull you through all that sand?”

“S-s-sure. And then I w-w-went to sleep.”

Well, say, I wish you could have seen Red’s face. *Mad?* Say, he was mad enough to bite off nails. Of course, I was kind of mad myself, to think that we had been pulling that lazy little prune around. But when I saw Red’s purple face I had to laugh in spite of myself.

He tried to get the towel away from me.

“Let me have it, Jerry,” he spoke through his teeth, “and I’ll dry him off. Boy!—he’ll be smoking when I get through with him.”

“Get away,” I ordered.

Here Grandma Carey called Red upstairs. But he wasn’t gone long. And when he came down his eyes were as big as teacups.

“What’s the matter with you?” I asked. “You act like you’re crazy.”

“Yes,” says he, “and you’ll act crazy too when I tell you about that bathtub, and what I just found out about it. Oh, baby!—are we ever the lucky little things.”

“Well, tell me,” says I eagerly.

“Wait a minute,” says he quickly. “Here comes Grandma Carey.”

CHAPTER II

A DOUBLE SURPRISE

“WHERE are you, Sammy?” called Grandma Carey, as she bustled into the room with a blanket on her arm.

“He’s over there behind the stove,” says I.

“Well, get him out,” she spoke quickly, “and we’ll wrap him up in this blanket.”

“You ought to wrap it around his neck in a good hard knot,” growled Red, “and hang him up on a limb.”

I threw Horse Foot a towel.

“Put that around you and come on out,” I told him.

“W-w-what for?” he asked.

“We’re going to make a papoose out of you,” I laughed.

“Yes,” Grandma Carey put in, “come on out and get in this chair, by the fire. And then we’re going to wrap you up nice and warm.”

“I’m w-w-warm already,” he said, coming.

“Yes,” growled Red, “and you’d be a whole

lot warmer, if I had you in a side room by myself.”

“Are you tucking him in good, Jerry?” Grandma Carey asked, from the other side of the chair.

“Sure thing,” I told her. “He’s tucked in swell over here.”

“I’m s-s-sweatin’,” Horse Foot gurgled.

“So much the better,” Grandma Carey spoke with satisfaction. “For that’s the best way in the world to ward off a cold—to get up a good sweat like that.”

“But if he sweats that way,” I asked, “won’t it be all the worse for him when he goes out again?”

“I was just wondering, Jerry,” she spoke thoughtfully, “if I shouldn’t keep him here all night.”

“Sure thing,” put in Red. “Keep him here forever, if you’ve got a cage big enough for him. For nobody else wants him.”

Up came Horse Foot’s tousled head in the blanket. And out came his tongue.

“Bah!” says he, making a horrible face at Red.

“Now, Sammy, that wasn’t a bit nice,” reproved Grandma Carey gently.

“I always said he was half monkey,” growled

Red. "And look at that face!—if that doesn't prove it, I don't know what would."

Grandma Carey turned and gave Red a curious look.

"What's the matter, Donald?" she inquired. "What has he done to make you feel that way toward him?"

"Oh, he crawled in the bathtub, that we were bringing home, and let us pull him up the hill."

The old lady smiled.

"And didn't you know that he was in the tub?"

"No, he sneaked in, behind our back. And I almost pulled a lung out."

"M-m-my pal," chirped Horse Foot, from the blanket.

"Gr-r-r!" Red ground his teeth.

I went to the window to see if the rain was over. For I was anxious to get started for home with the bathtub, and get the bath-house going.

"Come on," I called to Red, starting for the door. "I guess we can go now. For it's clearing up."

Horse Foot started to pile out of the blanket.

"I'm g-g-goin' too," he cried.

"No, no," Grandma Carey spoke firmly. "You're going to stay here with me—at least

till your parents come and get you. For I can tell by the way you're sneezing that you're in no condition to go out again in the rain."

"Oh, s-s-shucks," growled Horse Foot.

"Cover up," I told him.

"But I w-w-want to go too."

"You can tell his mother where he is, Jerry," Grandma Carey instructed.

"Sure thing," I promised. "I'll tell her."

"Well, good-by, baby-face," Red called to Horse Foot, from the door. "Don't forget to put on your bib for supper."

"Leave him alone," I growled.

And then Red suddenly stopped.

"Holy smoke!" says he, his eyes swelling. "I almost forgot."

"What?" says I.

"About that man who took a bath in our bathtub."

"What man?" says I.

He turned to the old lady.

"What's the man's name again, Grandma Carey?"

"Colonel Cody."

"Yes, that's it—Colonel Cody. He took a bath in it, Jerry."

"Well, what of it?" says I, wondering what there was about that to make him get so ex-

cited. "I suppose a lot of people took a bath in it," says I. "For that's what they bought it for."

"Yes, but you don't catch on—I mean Colonel Cody—the man with the big show."

"What big show?—what are you talking about anyway?"

"I mean the guy with the long hair and the wild-west show. Gosh! You know now, don't you?"

The guy with the wild-west show and the long hair! Sure, I knew who *he* was, all right, though I never had seen the show myself. But I had heard all about it from Dad.

"You mean Buffalo Bill," says I.

"Why, sure," wagged Red. "That's the guy. But his real name is Colonel Cody—I've been trying to tell you for the past hour."

"But what about him?" says I.

"I saw a picture of him upstairs. And when I asked Grandma Carey about him, and why she had his picture, she said she used to know him. She met him when she was a girl. And she says he took a bath in that tub of ours."

Gee-miny crickets! Gosh all Friday! I saw now why Red was so excited. For he knew how the little kids were about Buffalo Bill. They're

always talking about him and letting on, in their play, that they're cowboys like him. And now when they heard that he had taken a bath in our bathtub they would be crazy over it.

"You tell him the rest, Grandma Carey," Red prompted.

"Well," the old lady began, with some hesitation, "not having seen the tub at close range, I can't say positively that it's the same one that Colonel Cody used the time he was in Tutter. But from your description of it upstairs, I think it must be the same one."

"Oh, sure," Red spoke confidently. "I'm dead sure of that."

"I'd recognize it if I got a close look at it," says the old lady. "For I've cleaned it hundreds of times."

"And it was yours?" I asked her, surprised.

"Oh, no," Red spoke quickly. "It wasn't hers. But she thinks it came from the old Garvin house in Happy Hollow."

"I worked there when I was a girl," the old lady explained. "And I heard the other day that they're making a lot of changes over there, in the plumbing and heating—and putting in a lot of new stuff."

I stared at her harder than ever.

"And do you mean to tell me," says I, "that

old Buffalo Bill himself used to live there?"

"Oh, no," she spoke quickly. "He never lived there, nor any other place in Tutter, for that matter. But he stopped there one time on a visit. He and Colonel Garvin—that's the man I worked for—were old prairie friends. Dear me! I'll never forget how exciting it was that day with the show horses all around us, and the cowboys and Indians, and how proud Colonel Garvin was when he led his distinguished guest to the new bathtub—for at that time we had the only real bathtub in the whole countryside."

I felt like I was walking on air.

"Gee! I hope it is the same tub," says I. "For that'll bring the business in, let me tell you. For ~~what~~ kid wouldn't want to take a bath in the same tub that Buffalo Bill took a bath in?" Then I turned to Red. "Why, Red!" I cried. "It's a cinch. It's a walk-away."

"Well," says he, "I'm glad you finally found it out. I thought maybe I'd have to pound it into your head with a sledgehammer."

We all turned then as Horse Foot let out a gurgling snore.

“The little lamb!” says Grandma Carey, bending over him lovingly.

“He can go to sleep any place,” says I.

“Yes,” grimaced Red, “even in a bathtub, in the rain.”

Grandma Carey was ready now to go out with us to see the bathtub, to tell us for certain if it was the right one. So we went out together. But when we got to the place where we had left the tub, there was nothing there but some wheel tracks in the mud.

Someone had stolen the tub, wagon and all.

CHAPTER III

THE APPLE-BUTTER FIGHT

GRANDMA CAREY didn't understand at first that the bathtub had been stolen.

"But where is it?" she asked, looking around.

"It's gone," says I. "Someone stole it on us when we were in the house."

"Yes," growled Red, as he scowled down the road into town, "and I bet I know who it was too. I bet it's that old Bid Stricker, from Zulu-town. For I saw him fooling around the dump-pile when we were out there. And I bet a cookie he sneaked up on us and heard everything we said too."

"I bet you're right," says I excitedly.

"Maybe he thinks that *he* can start up a bathtub company of his own," says Red. "For he's always copy-catting."

"And what are we going to do about it?" says I, stiffening. "Let him do it? Or go down to his house and take the tub away from him?"

Red quickly answered that.

“Come on,” says he, starting off toward Zulutown with a fighting air.

“Dear me!” says Grandma Carey. “I wouldn’t quarrel over that old bathtub, if I were you. For it isn’t worth it.”

Red was almost to Zulu street now. For he was walking right along, like he meant business. So with a hurried good-by to Grandma Carey, I took after him.

“Are you still following the wheel tracks?” says I, when I caught up with him.

“Sure thing,” says he, watching the muddy ground. “And here’s some footprints too. See, Jerry?”

I measured them with my own.

“Just my size,” says I.

“Oh, they’re Bid Stricker’s, all right,” Red declared. “We’re on the right track—there’s no doubt about that.”

The tracks went around the corner of Zulu street, just as we figured they would.

“Look!” says I, pointing ahead. “That’s Bid’s house now, with the board fence around the yard.”

“Yes, I know the place,” says Red.

“Pretty tacky, huh?” says I.

It was a squatty little house, with little win-

dow panes in it and a tin roof. Anybody could see that the people who lived here were poor. But I wouldn't hold that against Bid, if he'd just quit pitching stuff at us, and leave us alone. For it's no disgrace to be poor. But it is a disgrace, I think, to act like Bid and that mean cousin of his.

Bid and Jimmy Stricker are the two meanest kids in town. And that big-mouthed Prater kid who hangs around with them is the same kind. They used to have Hib Milden in their gang, though I hadn't seen Hib lately. I guess he was away on a visit. But I was glad of it now. For if it *did* come to a fight at Bid's house, as seemed likely, we'd have only the three of them against us—Bid himself, Jimmy and Jum Prater.

We went as close as we dared and stopped.

"And what now?" says Red, looking to me for leadership. "What are we going to do next?"

"You wait here," says I, "and I'll go up and take a peek through the fence."

"Boy!—you better be careful," cautioned Red. "For this is Zulutown, you know, where the wild people live. And you know how sneaking those kids are. They may jump on you and pound the tar out of you."

"I don't see a soul around there," says I.

"Well, just the same I'd go easy, if I were in your place."

To tell the truth I hadn't the slightest idea how we were going to get the tub back. For it's hard to fight a kid in his own yard. You're liable to get his ma after you.

But I made up my mind to do something. For I wasn't going to give in to Bid Stricker *that* easy, and let him keep my stuff.

So I tiptoed to the fence and took a guarded peek. And then I tiptoed back to Red.

"Our wagon's over there by the house," says I. "And the tub's on the front porch. There's a sign on it too, but I couldn't read it."

"Maybe Bid's trying to sell it," says Red.

"But how in the dickens are we going to get it?" I puzzled. "Gosh! I don't want his ma to come out and slam-bang *me*. For they say she's awful when she gets started."

Red gave me the quiet signal then.

"Sh-h-h!" says he, with a finger to his lips. "I just saw somebody peeking over the fence."

"Yes, that's Jimmy. I saw him too," says I.

"Well, let's go over there and talk to him," Red suggested daringly. "Maybe we can pump him, and figure out some kind of a scheme. Shall we, Jerry?"

"All right," says I. "But you better be on your guard. For I bet Bid's around there too, waiting for us."

Jimmy was as nice as pie when we came up.

"Say," says he, leaning over the fence, "have you kids got any cats you want washed cheap?"

"*Cats?*" says I, staring at him. For I never expected him to start talking about cats.

"Yes," says he. "Cats with fleas on 'em." I didn't see any sense to that.

"Where's Bid?" I asked him, looking around.

"Oh, he's gone out looking for cats."

More cat stuff!

"What are you talking about?" says I.

"We just started a cat laundry," says he. "Didn't you see our sign?"

"I don't care anything about your old sign," I growled. "But that's our tub. And we want it back."

"*Your* tub?" he sneered.

"Yes, *our* tub," says I, sticking my jaw right back at him. "And we want it."

"We've got as much right to it as you."

"You haven't either—you stole it."

"Say!—don't you call *me* a thief," he swelled up.

“Well, it was either you or Bid,” says I. “And if you don’t give it up we’ll tell the cops.”

“You just wait’ll I call Bid for that. Hey, Bid!” he yelled.

“Whatcha want?” Bid answered, coming on the run.

“Do you know what these kids have just called you?”

Bid looked us over sneeringly.

“Oh, the swell guys, from the other side of town, huh?”

“They just called you a thief, Bid.”

“They did? *Me?*”

“We want our bathtub,” I told him.

“Yah, they said you stole it, Bid.”

“Stole it nothin’,” growled Bid, eyeing us meanly. “I found it in the road.”

“Yes,” says I, “on our coaster wagon, where we left it.”

“Well, take your old coaster wagon, if you want it.”

“We’re going to take it,” I told him grimly. “And that tub too.”

“You keep your hands off that tub,” he ordered bossily. “For it’s *our* tub now.”

“Yah,” says Jimmy, with a funny laugh, “we need it in our business.”

“What business?” I asked him quickly.

For I just wanted to see if they *were* going to start up a bathtub business like ours, like we had thought.

“Didn’t I just tell you about our sign?” says he. “We’re washing cats now—with fleas.”

Cats with fleas!

“In *our* tub,” I screeched, “that Buffalo Bill took a bath in?”

“What was that about Buffalo Bill?” Jimmy leaned over curiously.

But I wasn’t going to tell everything!

“Never you mind about that,” says I. “But you hadn’t better wash any more old cats in that tub, if you know what’s good for you.”

“We’ve washed six already,” Jimmy bragged.

“I don’t believe you,” says I.

For I didn’t think they’d had the time. For they hadn’t had the tub for more than an hour.

“You ask Bid,” wagged Jimmy.

“Sure,” wagged Bid. “Only it wasn’t six cats—it was eight. And you should ‘a’ seen the fleas float up.”

I looked at Red and he looked at me. For we both had the same thought.

“And after the cats,” says Bid, “we washed a pig.”

“A *pig*?” I gasped. “In *our* tub?”

“No,” says Bid, with a mean twist of his mouth. “Not in *your* tub—in *our* tub.”

I looked at Red again and he looked at me. And every second I felt worse. Pigs and cats! In the same tub that old Buffalo Bill took a bath in!

“We want our tub,” I told Bid fiercely. “And if you don’t give it up we’ll tell the cops. The idea!—washing *pigs* in it, and mangy old *cats*.”

“And why not?” Bid spoke indifferently. “It’s just an old tub that somebody threw on the dump-pile.”

“Oh,” I sneered, narrowing my eyes. “So you *were* watching us, huh?—when we found the tub.”

“I didn’t say so,” he crawfished.

“If you wanted it so bad,” says I, “why didn’t you take it yourself?”

“Oh,” says Jimmy, with a lordly air, “we thought we’d let you haul it up the hill for us.”

“Yah, and much obliged,” Bid laughed coarsely. “You saved us a lot of hard work. That’s pretty good of you, all right.”

“And have you really been washing cats in it?” Red inquired, hoping, I guess, that it was all talk.

But it wasn't. At least Bid said it wasn't.

"There's our sign," he pointed, with a swagger. "Cats washed, five cents each, and all fleas killed."

So that's what the sign said! Cats washed, five cents each, and all fleas killed! Gosh! It was getting worse every minute. I was awfully glad, let me tell you, that poor old Buffalo Bill himself wasn't there to know about the disgrace.

I told Bid that he was an old copy-cat.

"You never think up anything yourself," I told him, furious.

"Oh, yeah?" he sneered, in his most hateful way.

"No—you just sneak around and listen to us, and then go and do the same thing."

"You never said anything about washing cats," he fired back at me.

"No, but you heard us say something else like it. And then you go and copy-cat."

"Well," he swaggered, safe in his own yard, "if you want the tub, try and take it."

"We're going to," I told him.

Here Jum Prater lumbered up, with his big mouth sagging like a trap-door.

"What's all the argument about?" says he.

"Oh," says Bid, "a couple of swells from

the other part of town dropped in on us, to call us thieves, and some more stuff like that."

"Well, well," sneered Jum, squinting at Red. "If it isn't Meyersy, the human baboon. Got out of your cage ag'in, huh? How come?—did they forget to lock you in?"

And Red, of course, was tickled pink over that. Oh, my, yes!

"You'll pay for that, you big zipper-mouth," he screeched, dancing.

"Well, if anybody happens to ask you," says Jum, "your mouth isn't any pinhole."

"Go ahead and chaw their ears off," Bid ordered Jum.

"Three against two," I sneered.

"Well, you wanted the tub so bad," says Bid. "Why don't you come in and get it?"

"Boy!—I'd like to sock you," I cried. For he was too overbearing for anything.

"You think you're smart, Jerry Todd," he leveled his eyes at me, "just because you live in a big house on the other side of the tracks."

"If I lived in a woodshed," I yelled at him, "I'd be decent. I wouldn't be like you."

"Well, I'm just as good as you are," he snarled.

"I never said you weren't, and I never thought it either."

"You think you can run over me, just because your pa owns a brickyard."

"I never tried to run over you," I denied.

"You may be a big noise on the other side of the tracks, but you're just a little squeak around here."

"Give him a punch, Bid," egged Jimmy. "You can lick him. Go on."

"I'll give him a punch, all right," growled Bid, "if he don't get out of here and shut up. For I'm getting tired of his smart talk."

"You're awful brave," says I, "when you got your gang around you, and you're in your own yard."

"Well, if you don't like it, what are you going to do about it?"

"I'll fight you alone," I dared him.

"Oh, I don't want to dirty my hands on you," says he, with a lordly air.

"A good excuse," I told him. "You haven't got nerve enough to fight me alone."

"Why don't you go over on your own side of town," says he, "and stay there?"

"Yah," says Jimmy, "we didn't invite you over here. So go on home where you belong."

Then big-mouth swung in.

"Let's run 'em home," says he meanly.

“That’s an idea,” says Bid, starting over the fence.

Red took off for Main street. But I kept him going straight on down Zulu street. And when we got around the corner, by the brickyard, I grabbed him and pulled him into the bushes.

“Gosh!” says he, scared. “They’ll murder us now.”

“Feel around,” says I. “And you may change your mind.”

For I knew where I was! The day before I had dumped a bag of rotten apples in the bushes. They were there still, just as I suspected. And loading up, we cut in behind the Strickers, when they galloped past, and ran them clear down to the canal bank.

“Ouch!” squawked Bid, as he got one of the squashy apples on the back of his head. “I’ll get you for that, Jerry Todd.”

“You will steal our bathtub, huh?” I yelled, as I wound up for another juicy crack.

“Ouch!” squawked Jum, bending back, as the apple-butter spread out on the seat of his pants.

“How do you like it?” I yelled.

“Yes,” screeched Red, as he clipped Jum

another one on the neck. "Call me a baboon, will you?"

With the rotten apples flying after them that way, they couldn't do a thing to help themselves. For they didn't dare to turn and face it. To get away from us, they finally jumped into a boat and rowed across the canal, out of range. Which gave us a swell chance to run back for the bathtub.

We dumped it on the wagon and down the street we tore, lickety-cut, with the Strickers coming yelling from the canal, and Bid's mother coming after us with a broom.

CHAPTER IV

RED AND HIS MA

RED ran in the house as soon as we got home, to tell his ma about the bathtub. He thought she'd be pleased. But the minute he mentioned it she stiffened up like a stove-poker.

"Donald," says she quietly, "you aren't telling me a thing. I know all about that old bathtub. So save your breath."

"But who told you?" says Red, surprised.

"I just had a phone call from Mrs. Stricker."

Red grinned.

"And did she tell you about the rotten apples, ma?"

"Yes," came the stiff reply, "I know all about the tub and the apples too."

"Well," growled Red, on the defensive, "you needn't start scowling at *me* about it. For all we did was to stick up for our own rights. And that's what pa wants me to do. For he's told me so, lots of times."

"But he doesn't want you going around

town snitching old bathtubs," Mrs. Meyers corrected sharply.

"But we didn't snitch it, ma," Red declared earnestly. "It was Bid Stricker who snitched it on us."

"Donald," his mother spoke quietly, "tell me the truth now—who found that tub anyway?—you or the Stricker boy?"

"Why, we did. Didn't we, Jerry?" Red appealed to me.

"You bet your boots," says I, wagging.

"But Mrs. Stricker says it's hers. And she says if you don't bring it back she's going to tell the police."

"Well, don't you believe her, ma," cried Red. "For we didn't either steal it. We found it on the town dump-pile. And then Bid Stricker stole it from us."

"But if he wanted it that bad," says Mrs. Meyers, "why in the world didn't you let him have it?—instead of fighting over it. Honest to goodness, Donald Meyers!—you do some of the silliest things. Lugging home a filthy old bathtub like that, and then fighting over it, like it was some rare prize."

"It isn't either a filthy old bathtub," Red defended indignantly. "It's a good bathtub—

only it's tin. But that's all right. And Buffalo Bill took a bath in it too."

"I don't care if the king of England took a bath in it," his mother told him sharply. "I don't want it around here; and what's more I'm not going to have it around here."

"Aw, ma!" squawked Red. "Please, ma! Have a heart! I do lots for you. Please, ma!"

"But what do you want with another bathtub?" his mother frowned. "Good heavens!—you're scared to death of the one we've got. I almost have to club you to get you in it. And then you go and lug home another one, to clutter up the yard."

Red got my eye.

"Shall we tell her, Jerry," says he eagerly, "how we're going into the portable bathtub business?"

"Now what?" his mother eyed him suspiciously.

"Oh, we got a swell scheme, ma," he bubbled. "We're going to get rich. And Buffalo Bill took a bath in it too. Gee! I'm so happy I could jump over the house."

"Well," Mrs. Meyer spoke dryly, "you may have to jump a whole lot higher than that, if Mrs. Stricker gets her hands on you. For she

was mad enough to chew the telephone up."

"And what did you tell her, ma?" Red asked quickly.

"I told her if it *was* her tub, I'd send it home, of course."

"But it isn't hers. Bid just told her that. It's ours. For we found it first."

"But why fight over an old bathtub? If she wants it, let her have it."

"I won't do anything of the kind," Red refused flatly. "For it's our tub, and we're going to keep it."

"But what good is an old bathtub to you and Jerry? Besides, I thought you went after a stove, to start a club."

"We couldn't find a stove," says Red.

"And that bathtub was the next best thing to lug home, huh?" his mother sighed. "Oh, dear! And then you have to go and get into a fight over it, and get Mrs. Stricker all worked up for nothing."

"Do you think she will tell the police, ma?" Red spoke anxiously.

"I wouldn't put it past her. For she was mad enough to do it."

"Well, we got proof that the tub is ours," declared Red. "Haven't we, Jerry?"

“Yes,” I told Mrs. Meyers, “Grandma Carey can tell you whose it is. For she saw us pulling it up her hill, before Bid stole it on us.”

“But why quarrel over an old bathtub?” Mrs. Meyers asked again. “If the Strickers want it, let them have it.”

“But, ma!—didn’t I just tell you. Buffalo Bill took a bath in it.”

“Buffalo Bill again! And why do you keep talking about *him*?”

“Because he took a bath in it, I tell you. For Grandma Carey told us so.”

“All right, all right,” Mrs. Meyers spoke with more patience. “Maybe he did. And maybe the Ringling brothers took a bath in it too. But that doesn’t make it any better to me.”

“Well, it ought to,” Red declared stiffly. “For it’s an honor to have a tub that Buffalo Bill took a bath in.”

“Oh, Donald!” his mother again lost patience with him. “You talk silly.”

“But, ma!—he was a hero. I read it in a book. It said on the cover—Buffalo Bill, the hero of the plains.”

Mrs. Meyers got herself a chair.

“Oh, dear!” says she, sinking wearily. “I

pity any mother who has to raise six, if they all get to chasing after Buffalo Bill bathtubs. But tell me, Donald, what in the world are you going to do with it anyway?—a filthy old thing like that.”

“We’re going to start a bathtub company,” says he. “The Tutter Portable Bathtub Company. And we’re going to build a little bathhouse, with wheels on it, so we can pull it around town and sell baths to the kids.”

“Say, Red,” I spoke quickly, as another idea popped into my head. “I wonder if it wouldn’t be better to call it the Buffalo Bill Bathtub Company. What do you think?”

“Sure thing,” he agreed excitedly. “That’s better still.”

“Oh, dear!” Mrs. Meyers sighed helplessly. “I wish your father would come home and take a hand in this.”

“Where is he, ma?” Red asked.

“Well,” came the dry reply, “I suppose he’s down in Zulutown, scraping up the apple-butter. For that’s where he headed for, when he heard about the fight.”

“And who told him that?—you?”

“Yes, I said Mrs. Stricker had just phoned that you had stolen her bathtub. And I told him he’d better go down there and see what

it was all about—before you took a notion to run off with her kitchen stove, or the piano.”

“Gosh!” Red laughed. “I hope she doesn’t jump on *him*.”

“All this trouble,” sputtered Mrs. Meyers, “over a worthless old bathtub.”

“You won’t talk that way,” says Red, wagging wisely, “when we start pulling in the money.”

“Oh, Donald! If you aren’t the silliest thing I ever heard tell of.”

“All right,” Red kept on wagging, “go ahead and call me names, if you want to. But you’ll change your mind when you see us start out with our nice new bath-house, with a big sign on the sides, and everything.”

“Yes,” says Mrs. Meyers quietly, “that’ll be a proud day for me, and for your father too, I imagine—if it ever happens.”

“We’re going to get an old four-wheeled buggy,” says Red. “And then we’re going to take the top off and make it into a little bath-house.”

“Say, Red,” says I, “I know where we can get some old wallboard, to side it up.”

“Hot diggety-dog!” says he. “That’ll make swell siding. We can work it up as easy as anything. And we can paint a sign on it—the

Buffalo Bill Bathtub Company. Hey, kids, call us up when you need a bath, only twenty-five cents, soap and scouring powder free. . . . How's that, Jerry? Did I get it right?"

"We mustn't forget about the singles and doubles," says I.

"All right, we'll paint on the sign—twenty-five cents single and thirty-five cents double."

Mrs. Meyers was taking it all in.

"Donald!—just a minute, till your father gets here. And you too, Jerry."

"What now?" says Red.

"Tell me the truth, are you boys joking?—just to hear me scold."

"Well, I don't see where the joke is," says Red, seriously.

"Then you haven't looked in the glass," says his mother shortly.

"What glass?" he asked dumbly.

I knew what she meant. And did I ever laugh, as Red stood there with his jaw sagging.

"She means you!" says I.

"Me?" says he. "Did you, ma?"

"Let it go," says she patiently. "But listen now, the both of you. Did you ever hear of anybody renting out a bathtub?"

"Not on wheels," says Red. "But down

town there's a barber who sells baths. Isn't there, Jerry?"

"Yes, that's where we got the idea, Mrs. Meyers," I explained. "Only he sells baths to men, and we're going to sell baths to kids."

"And *will* we sell them," says Red, in high feather, "when we get that Buffalo Bill sign on our bath-house. Oh, boy! For what kid wouldn't want to take a bath in the same tub that Buffalo Bill took a bath in—the hero of the plains."

"Well," says Mrs. Meyers, with a resigned air, "I can plainly see that I'm out of it. But I'm hoping that when your father gets home he can talk some sense into you."

"We'll have to give the tub a good cleaning," I told Red.

"Yes," says he, "after the Strickers washing cats in it, and a pig."

"What's that?" squealed Mrs. Meyers, popping up in her chair.

"Oh," growled Red, "Bid Stricker had to go and copy-cat again. For he heard us telling what we were going to do with the tub. Only instead of fixing it up for kids to wash in, he goes and washes some mangy old cats in it, for five cents each, and a pig."

“Good heavens!” gurgled Mrs. Meyers, sinking back in the seat like she had lost all her strength. “And then you go and lug it home!—the mangy old thing!”

“Bid ought to have his neck broke,” growled Red, “washing old cats and pigs in our Buffalo Bill tub.”

“Let’s go out and clean it now,” I suggested.

“Yes,” Mrs. Meyers spoke quickly, “and see that you take it just as far away from the house as you can.”

“But I’m going to hide it in the cellar,” says Red, “when we get it cleaned up.”

“You’ll do nothing of the kind,” his mother declared flatly.

“Aw, ma!—please!” he started coaxing again.

“Don’t ‘aw, ma,’ me,” she went on unbendingly. “I’ll show you who’s running this house. A mangy old bathtub!” she wound up scornfully, with her nose in the air.

“But just think who took a bath in it!—old Buffalo Bill himself, the hero of the plains.”

“I don’t care if the man in the moon took a bath in it—it’s not coming in this house, or anywhere near it.”

“Well, if I can’t hide it in the cellar,” de-

clared Red, with a will of his own, "I'm going to set up all night and guard it."

"When ten o'clock comes, Donald Meyers," his mother told him flatly, "you're going to bed, if I have to switch you all the way up the stairs."

"Aw, ma!—you're too mean for anything," he bellowed.

"Yes," his mother spoke with weary patience, "I'm terribly mean because I won't let you lug a mangy old bathtub in the house. Heaven only knows how many tramps washed their feet in it, while it was out there on the dump-pile."

"It was only there a day or two. So how could a lot of tramps wash their feet in it?"

"And who threw it out—do you know that?"

"Sure—the people in the old Garvin house, in Happy Hollow."

"Is that where it came from?" Mrs. Meyers asked curiously.

"Yes, and Grandma Carey worked there, when she was a girl," says Red. "And that's how she knew that Buffalo Bill took a bath in the tub."

"Well, it isn't as bad as I thought," Mrs. Meyers gave in a little bit. "But I still don't

want it in the house. And what's more, I won't have it in the house—and that's final."

"Well," Red compromised, "can Jerry and I sleep in the barn then, and guard it? For if we don't, the Strickers are liable to come back and steal it."

Here an auto drove hurriedly into the yard.

"Thank heaven!" says Mrs. Meyers, with great relief. "It's your father at last."

Red met his pa in the doorway.

"Well, what's the latest news from the battle front, pop?" came the merry question.

"Yes," growled Mr. Meyers, as he came in and closed the door behind him, "it looks like a battle front down there."

"Find lots of apple-butter?" Red further laughed.

He knew he could talk to his pa that way, for they're good pals.

"Where in Sam Hill did you get all those rotten apples anyway?" Mr. Meyers inquired, with a weak grin.

"Oh, we found them," laughed Red.

"They told me you chased the Stricker gang clear across the canal."

"Yes, and you should 'a' heard them squawk, pop, every time they got a smack."

"Oh, oh!" says Mr. Meyers, blinking.

“But they deserved it,” Red added earnestly, “for stealing our bathtub, and washing mangy old cats in it.”

“But Mrs. Stricker says it’s her tub,” Mr. Meyers spoke gravely, “and she wants it back.”

Red began to jump around at that.

“Well, it isn’t hers, pop, and don’t you let her tell you so either. It’s ours. We found it on the town dump-pile. And we hauled it all the way to Grandma Carey’s house. And that’s where Bid stole it on us—when we were in there out of the rain.”

“Yes,” put in Mrs. Meyers, “and Grandma Carey told them that the Ringling brothers took a bath in it. And now they’re going to put wheels on it.”

“It wasn’t either the Ringling brothers,” Red corrected heatedly. “It was Buffalo Bill, the hero of the plains.”

“Well,” says Mrs. Meyers, “it was someone with a circus, so what difference does it make? A bath is a bath.”

“But what was that about wheels?” puzzled Mr. Meyers.

“Oh,” his excited wife ran on, “they’ve got the silly idea that they can rent the bathtub to kids with wheels on.”

“Kids with wheels on!” stared Mr. Meyers.

“Say, what in Sam Hill are you talking about anyway?”

“Oh,” Red swung in, “she’s got things all tangled up, pa. She doesn’t mean kids with wheels on—she means our bathtub.”

“Well, keep still about it now,” says Mrs. Meyers, as she started across the kitchen. “For there’s the phone.”

“Oh, oh!” says Mr. Meyers. “The police department, I suppose.”

But it wasn’t. It was my ma, telling me to come home to supper.

So I hurried off, telling Red that I’d be back soon to help him scour up the old bathtub, and guard it overnight.

CHAPTER V

GETTING READY FOR BID

SUPPER was all ready when I got home. I could smell beefsteak and gravy. And there was a can of big yellow peaches—the kind I like so well—setting on the kitchen cabinet. Boy!—I didn't waste any time getting to the table, let me tell you. For after that lively apple-butter fight, and everything, I was hollow all the way through.

“Well, well,” says Dad, with his nose in the evening newspaper, “I see we've just had another big battle.”

“Where was that?” says Mother, biting into a pickle. “Down in South America?”

“No,” says Dad, rustling the paper, “down in Zulutown.”

Oh, oh! I got my nose right down in the plate then.

“Zulutown?” says Mother, looking up, surprised. “You mean *here*?—in Tutter?”

“Man, oh, man!” Dad went on, acting like he was reading to himself out of the newspaper

and talking about it. "That must 'a' been some battle, all right, from the description. For just listen to this: Enemy sweeps down on unprepared Zuluites, driving them back to the canal bank under a withering fire of apple-butter. More apple-butter bombs bursting in air. Scene of great desolation on battlefield, as routed Zuluites stagger home through apple-butter half-way to their knees."

Mother was eyeing me now. For she wasn't so dumb!

"Oh," says she, nodding her head slowly, like she had each nod timed. "So it's *you* that's been down in Zulutown again apple-buttering, huh? And what were you and those quarrelsome Stricker boys apple-buttering about this time?—tell me."

"A bathtub," says I.

"A *what?*" says she, staring.

"A bathtub," says I.

"A *bathtub?*" she repeated. "Do you mean a wash-tub?"

"No, I mean a bathtub. We found it on the town dump-pile, and started for town with it, but Bid Stricker stole it on us, and we had to fight to get it back."

"But what in the world—" she began.

But I cut her off. For I knew what was

coming. And I figured I might just as well dish it all out then and there, and have it over with.

“If you’ll wait a few days you’ll find out what we’re going to do with it,” says I. “For we’re going to build a little bath-house on wheels and go into the portable bathtub business. And we’re going to sell baths to kids. The Buffalo Bill Bathtub Company,” I wound up, proudly.

Dad had his paper down now, so he could see me.

“Do you know,” says he, with a thoughtful jerk of his head, “I think that’s a pretty good idea. And that name too—the Buffalo Bill Bathtub Company—that ought to take with the kids swell.”

It made me feel good all over to have Dad stick up for me that way. Mrs. Meyers had made out that we didn’t know beans. And I don’t think that Mr. Meyers was so very hot about our scheme either. But Dad saw it was a good scheme.

“And why did you say you called it the Buffalo Bill Bathtub Company?” he asked.

“Because old Buffalo Bill took a bath in it himself,” says I.

“You don’t mean to tell me!” says Dad,

perking up. "And how did you find that out?"

"From Grandma Carey."

Mr. Rail came in just as we were finishing. That's Horse Foot's pa, you know.

"Busy, Todd?" says he shortly.

"No," says Dad. "What's up?"

"I thought maybe I could get you to help me round up that kid of mine. For he's been gone since morning. And his ma's half crazy."

"I know where he is," says I quickly.

"Where?" Mr. Rail asked.

"Out to Grandma Carey's house. He got caught in the rain this afternoon and she's drying out his pants for him."

"Oh! That's it, huh? Well, I better run home and tell his ma. For she's bouncing around. Thanks just the same, Todd."

Red had hauled the bathtub into the barn, where he could work on it under the electric light. And when I got there, with my blankets, he was standing in the tub bare-legged, with enough suds around him to swab an elephant.

"I see you've come to stay all night," says he.

"And how'd you come out?" says I. "Did your ma finally give in?"

"Yes, she's all right now."

"Well, I won't be all right," Mrs. Meyers

spoke sharply for herself from the doorway, "if you get my scrubbing brush all plastered up with cat germs."

"Oh, oh!" says Red, with a comical look on his face. "I thought you were in the house."

"I'm on my way to a club meeting, and I want you to behave yourself while I'm gone. That's what I came out to tell you."

Red kicked up the suds.

"Look, ma!" says he.

"What!" she cried. "Are you wading around in there bare-legged? Oh, dear! If you don't get cat germs in your toenails, it'll be a wonder."

"And have you heard any more from Mrs. Stricker?" Red asked, as he pulled up his pants another notch to get them out of the suds.

"No," was the short reply. "But I'm hoping she'll bring the police over here and take that silly tub away from you."

"Tra-la-la-la-la," sang Red, kicking up the suds some more. "You can't scare me with talk like that."

"You better be careful," I laughed, "or you'll slip."

But I spoke too late. For down he went, with the suds scooting out on all sides like a tidal wave.

Mrs. Meyers jumped back squealing.

"All over my good dress!" she squealed, dabbing frantically with her handkerchief.

Red got up sheepish.

"I didn't mean to do it, ma," says he. "Honest, I didn't. I slipped."

"Well, don't stand there in that buggy water," she cried, all out of patience with him. "Get out of there, and go change your pants. And then, for goodness' sake, keep out of there."

He went up the path singing, "Tra-la-la-la-la!" with his ma growling behind him. Then a door banged, as they went into the house. Then someone giggled overhead, in the dark haymow.

I looked up quick. For I thought it was the Strickers, getting ready to heave stuff at me. But instead it was Peg and Scoop.

They came down laughing.

"We thought we'd hide on you," says Peg.

"And does Red know you're here?" says I.

"Sure. We've been here for twenty minutes or more, watching him work. And we're going to stay all night too."

"Then you know about the big fight in Zulu-town?" says I eagerly.

"Yes, Red told us all about it," says Scoop.

“And are *we* sore,” growled Peg. “All that fun!—and you never let us in on it.”

“Well, it’s your own fault,” says I. “For we asked you to go with us this morning. But you never showed up.”

“Pa made me work in the store,” growled Scoop.

“Yes,” Peg growled in turn, “and I had to shake rugs. But I could ’a’ got away this afternoon just as easy as anything.”

“Dad knows all about the fight too,” says I. “For he was just kidding me about it at supper. He let on that it was in the newspaper.”

“And do you really think that Bid’ll come back to-night?” says Peg.

“Well, your guess is as good as mine,” says I.

“I tell you how we’ll work it,” says Peg, with dancing eyes. “We’ll leave all the barn doors unlocked—see? And we’ll fix some buckets of water so they’ll fall down, if anybody comes sneaking in.”

That was a swell idea, I thought. And I knew it would work good too, having worked it before. So when Red came back, in dry pants, we got all the buckets we could and filled them with the sudsy water in the tub. And pretty soon we had buckets and cans and about a

million other things balanced on top of the doors, which stood open about six inches, sort of inviting-like.

But that wasn't all. We wanted Bid to trip up too, and bang his nose. So we fixed a rope outside, on the ground, so we could pull it up knee-high, when we wanted to.

The idea was to pull the rope from inside the minute we heard a bucket go down. For Bid, of course, would start running for safety the minute he got a bucket on his head. And then, as he struck the rope, down he'd go, bucket and all, with probably his whole gang piling on top of him, and us piling out with paddles.

After which, we figured, with the ducking and spatting and everything, Bid would know enough to stay on his own side of town, so we could go ahead with our bathtub scheme in peace.

And now I'll tell you how the trap worked, and what happened that night.

CHAPTER VI

WAITING IN THE DARK

“BR-R-R!” says Peg, after a long wait in the dark. “I’m getting cold. And if those birds are coming, I wish they’d hurry up about it, so I can get a little exercise with my paddle.”

“It’s early yet,” says Scoop.

“Yes,” says Peg, “but I never figured on staying here, when I came over, or I’d ’a’ wore heavier clothes.”

“And that makes me think,” says Scoop, “we haven’t phoned home yet. And we should, if we’re going to stay all night.”

“Well, why don’t you do it now,” says I, “and have it over with.”

“But how am I going to get out of here? Gosh!—I wish I’d thought of it sooner.”

“Well, we can take some of the stuff down,” says Peg.

“No, leave it there,” Red says quickly. “For I know a way out.”

And moving some old boxes around, on the

east side of the barn, he went out on his stomach through a little chicken hole.

Scoop got ready to follow.

“Shall I phone for you too, Peg?” he asked.

“Yes, if you will. And for Pete’s sake, see if you can’t scare up an extra sweater in there.”

“How about that, Red?” Scoop spoke through the chicken hole. “Peg wants a sweater. Can you fix him up?”

“I don’t know about a sweater,” Red spoke back through the hole. “But I can get plenty of blankets.”

“Well, anything to wrap up in,” shivered Peg, “to keep me warm.”

“Take one of my blankets,” I offered.

All this talk was in the dark. And when Scoop and Red came back, with a supply of blankets, we further sat there in the dark, Peg and Scoop near the big door, toward the house, and Red and I sitting close to the rear door, which gave on the alley.

Everybody had a blanket on now. But even then we shivered some. It was that cold afternoon rain. Everything was clammy from it. And it kept blowing in on us through the doors.

Red got my ear.

“What are you thinking about, Jerry?” he whispered.

“Old Arnoldsmitth,” I whispered back.

“Who?” says he, surprised.

“The old detective,” says I, “who sold us those fake detective badges. You remember?”

“Yes, but whatever made you think of him?” Red spoke wonderingly.

“Oh, I heard the college clock strike a few minutes ago. And I got to thinking about the time we went up there to capture the mummy thief.”

“Did you count the strokes?” asked Red.

“Yes—ten.”

“Is it that late?” he showed surprise.

“I think it was ten,” says I. “But maybe it was nine.”

“Well, we’ll listen when it strikes again.”

“But the Strickers ought to be here before then,” says I. “And maybe we’ll be asleep.”

“Say,” Peg growled through the dark, from his side, “what are you guys mumbling about over there? Why don’t you keep still, like us? For we’ll never catch the Strickers if you keep mumbling that way. Don’t you think Bid has ears?”

“I was just asking Jerry what time it was,” says Red.

“Well, it’s time for you to pipe down,” growled Peg.

After another long silence, the tower clock on College Hill donged again.

“How many was that?” Scoop asked sleepily, across the barn.

“Eleven,” I told him.

“Oh, let’s go to bed,” says he wearily. “For this isn’t any fun. Come on, Peg. We can hear them if they come, and get up quick enough.”

“All right,” Peg gave in.

It was our plan to sleep double, two on each side of the tub. And getting our beds ready, we turned in.

Red dropped off right away. But I lay there listening as the neighborhood sounds died off one after another, till finally everybody around us was in bed. Then, about eleven-thirty, Mr. Meyers drove in and put his car up for the night.

He had a part of the barn partitioned off for that.

Red popped up beside me.

“Was that pa?” says he.

“Yes,” says I.

If Mr. Meyers thought of us at all, in our part of the barn, he figured, I guess, that we were sound asleep. For he went straight on to the house whistling.

“Do you know what I just dreamt, Jerry?”
Red asked me, with a funny little laugh.

“No, what?”

“I dreamt we were making bathtub wheels out of grindstones. And old Buffalo Bill himself was painting signs on them for us.”

“Honest, Red?”

“Yes, and Lindbergh was waiting to take a bath.”

“I bet you’re making that up.”

“No, honest, Jerry,” he laughed. “And you were measuring him up with a tape measure to see if he’d fit in the tub. For you thought he was too long.”

“Of all the crazy dreams,” I laughed.

“And then guess what?” Red went on.

“Well, what?”

“Ma came walking in with an ice-cream cone as big as a pumpkin. And she said, Donald I’m so proud of you—go ahead and eat it all yourself, and when you get through with that I’ve got some cream puffs for you, and some bananas.”

“Well, she didn’t act that way to-night, when we first got home,” says I. “In fact, I thought she acted kind of ’shamed of you.”

“Oh, boy!” he spoke longingly. “I wish that ice-cream cone was real.”

A double snore came over the bathtub.

“Well, that finishes them,” laughed Red.

“For two cents I’d go home and get something to eat,” says I. “For you made me hungry with all that cream-puff talk.”

“I feel kind of hungry myself,” says he.

“And shall we take turns going out?” says I.

“It doesn’t look like the Strickers are coming to-night,” says he. “For see how late it is! So let’s go together. And you needn’t bother to go home either. For I can get you all you want in the house.”

The buckets were still over the doors. And rather than monkey with them then, and maybe get a bath ourselves, we went out through the little chicken hole, leaving Scoop and Peg still sound asleep on the floor.

But the house wasn’t dark as we expected. The front part was all lit up. And when we got to the big bay window, where we could see inside, there was Mr. Meyers stretched out sound asleep on the parlor davenport.

“He’s waiting for ma to come home,” says Red. “But I guess we can get in all right, if we’re quiet.”

He had left the back-door key under the mat. And getting it, he guardedly unlocked the door and opened it.

Once inside, he closed two doors between us and the parlor. Which made it pretty safe for us. Then he switched on the kitchen lights.

“Well, what do you want?” says he, going to the ice-box.

“What have you got?” says I.

“Oh, everything from jello to bananas.”

“Jello sounds good—if you’re sure your ma won’t care.”

“Well, she’s getting plenty to eat at that club of hers. So I don’t see why we can’t too. But if you hear her coming, Jerry,” he cautioned, “you better duck. For she’s been jawing like sixty about me going to the ice-box.”

“Well, you do go to it a lot,” says I. And it was true too. For I knew all about it, being with him so much.

“But what’s an ice-box for,” he swaggered, “if you can’t eat out of it when you’re hungry? You might just as well have beds and sleep on the floor.”

Then, as he opened it, he fell back with a surprised gasp. For pinned to a shelf was a note from his ma.

Here it is:

I’m sorry, Donald, but the jello’s all gone. You had the last of it for supper. There isn’t

any meat for sandwiches either, and I took all the bananas with me. So if you and Jerry find yourselves on the verge of starvation to-night you'll have to nibble on a cracker. You'll find a few in the bowl on the table.

I laughed at it myself. For I thought it was funny. But Red got mad.

"Huh!" he snorted. "She thinks she's smart. But I'll fix her," he added grimly, as he started for the cellar door.

"Where you going now?" I asked him quickly.

"Down cellar to get some jam. And while I'm gone you can cut some bread. Nibble on a cracker! And I'm going to get the best jam she's got too."

"Oh, don't make her mad," says I uneasily.

"Go on and cut the bread," he growled, as he went on down the stairs to the jam cupboard, "and I'll be up in a minute."

"Where is it?" I asked him.

"In the bread box in the pantry."

But before I could get to it, Mrs. Meyers herself bounced in the front door.

CHAPTER VII

WHAT RED AND I OVERHEARD

RED had told me to beat it if his mother came. But if I went out now he'd get caught in the cellar. So I ran down to warn him.

He was hanging to a shelf of the jam cupboard, reaching up.

"Sh-h-h!" says I, when I got to him.

He looked down, startled.

"Pa?" says he.

"No," says I, "your ma."

"Oh, oh!" says he. And I got ready to catch him. But he managed to get down himself without falling.

Then we tiptoed to the foot of the cellar stairs to listen.

"Hoo-hoo!" says Mrs. Meyers, in the front hall. "Hoo-hoo, Charley!"

Then we heard Mr. Meyers.

"Ouch!" he groaned, like he had just rolled over on a pin-cushion.

"What's the matter, Charley?"

"I got a crick in my neck."

“Well, I should think you would get a crick in your neck, with your head hanging over the end of the davenport that way. . . . But why didn’t you go to bed?”

“Oh, I thought I’d wait up for you. . . . Walk home?”

“Yes, with Mrs. Todd.”

“Have a good time?”

“Yes, but the coffee was awful. And why they ever let that Mrs. Gallagher loose in the kitchen is a riddle to me. For they all know her. But she’s never satisfied till she gets her nose in the coffee pot. Oh, let *me* do it, she says. And if anybody tries to wedge her out, she says, oh, no, I’m going to do it. So she did it to-night as usual. And if you ever tasted flavored rain-water. Oof! It gags me just to think of it. No wonder her husband got a traveling job, selling hot-water bottles. I think I’d want to board out too, if I was him.”

They were both moving around now. In fact Mrs. Meyers had been moving around, and opening doors, ever since she came in. That’s why we didn’t dare sneak out. It would be safer, we figured, to wait down there till they both went to bed, and then sneak out.

“I wouldn’t mind a cup of coffee myself,” says Mr. Meyers, yawning.

“Well, I can make you some, Charley, if you want it,” came the quick offer.

“Oh, you needn’t bother for me. For it’ll soon be breakfast-time anyway.”

“I did stay rather late, didn’t I?” says Mrs. Meyers. “But we got to talking about old times, and how much fun we had going to school together. But come on to the kitchen and I’ll make you that coffee. For after that mess over there to-night I’d like a good cup myself. Besides, I’ve got a job for you. And I want to wake you up.”

“A job?” says Mr. Meyers, surprised.

“I’ll tell you about it in a few minutes. For I’ve made up my mind to something. But come now, if you want some coffee.”

Red growled in my ear.

“I hope she don’t take a notion to fry him some ham and eggs too,” says he, impatient to get away.

I thought I had closed the door at the head of the stairs. But I hadn’t. It was open an inch or two. And that’s how the voices came to us so plainly.

“Have a good crowd?” Mrs. Meyers inquired, about the picture show, as she got out the coffee pot and filled it.

“Oh, fair. . . . But what’s that job?”

“Well, you wait till I get the coffee ready and I’ll tell you. And for heaven’s sake, Charley, quit yawning like that. For all I can think of is a hippopotamus. And Donald’s going to look just like you when he grows up. Oh, dear! I can see the resemblance growing every day.”

Mr. Meyers didn’t like that. We could hear him grumbling. Then, when the coffee was ready, we heard the click of cups.

“All right, Charley,” says Mrs. Meyers.

“How about some sandwiches too?” he suggested.

“There’s some peanut butter in the pantry.”

“Phooey on your old peanut butter. Isn’t there any cold meat in the ice-box?”

And the minute he said “ice-box” Red gripped my hand like a vise.

“Now listen,” says he breathlessly.

Mrs. Meyers laughed.

“That makes me think,” says she. “Was Donald in here?”

“Not that I know of. Why?”

“Well, you go to the ice-box and look.”

And all the time Red was gripping my hand like he was drowning, and it was the only thing he could reach.

Mr. Meyers opened the ice-box and chuckled.

“Oh! . . . so we have a humorist in the

family, huh? And when did you put that there?"

"Before I went to the club. For I knew what to expect with Donald sleeping in the barn, and probably gathering all of his chums around him. For the minute my back's turned, he brings the whole neighborhood in here and fills 'em up. But I fooled him this time."

"It's a wonder he didn't write something on the note for you," chuckled Mr. Meyers. "For he isn't so dumb."

"Well, maybe he hasn't seen it yet. But I'll just leave it there till morning. For he may come slipping in here yet, when we're in bed. You never can tell, with him."

Chairs scraped then as they sat down to the kitchen table to enjoy their coffee.

"Want some more cream, Charley?"

"No, I've got plenty," Mr. Meyers gurgled.

"Charley! Quit that! Honest to goodness, you sound just like that old octopus that tried to bite Aunt Ella's fingers off, in the zoo."

"Octopus! You don't know a walrus from an octopus."

"Well, that's what you sound like anyway, cooling your coffee that way. It isn't mannerly."

"One minute I'm a hippopotamus and the

next I'm an octopus! You ought to start a menagerie."

"Do you want some cookies, Charley?"

"Sure, if you've got some handy."

We could trace Mrs. Meyers' footsteps in and out of the pantry.

"I had them hid from Donald," says she, when she got back to the table.

"But you haven't told me yet about that job," says Mr. Meyers. "What is it? The furnace?"

"No, it isn't the furnace."

"I got those new grates this morning. And I'll put them in as soon as I get time."

"Charley, I want you to promise me something."

"What?"

"That you'll do what I ask you without arguing. Please, Charley! It'll be such a relief to me."

"But won't it wait till morning?"

"No. I want you to do it to-night. And I've already spoken to Mr. Todd about it."

"Todd? Why, he's in bed."

"No, he isn't. For I just stopped there on the way home with Mrs. Todd. He was up reading. And he promised me he'd come over and help you."

“But help me what?” puzzled Mr. Meyers.

Here a car drove into the yard.

“It’s Dad!” says I, amazed, as a man got out and came hurriedly to the back door.

The cellar door above us banged shut as the outside door opened. And there Red and I stood, dumfounded, as the jumble of voices over our heads continued.

We could make out that Mrs. Meyers was coaxing Mr. Meyers to do something he didn’t want to do. But we couldn’t make out what it was.

Then they all went out on the back porch.

CHAPTER VIII

AN EXCITING NIGHT

I OFTEN think about the awful mess that my pa got into that night, and Red's pa. For you probably guessed it by this time. It was that old bathtub. Mrs. Meyers hated it, though for no good reason. And she finally coaxed her husband and my pa into taking it away in the dark, while we were asleep.

Dad didn't want to do it. He told me afterwards he felt like a sneak, after telling me that way what a swell scheme it was, and everything. And Red's pa didn't want to do it either. But they couldn't hold out against Mrs. Meyers. Boy!—she was bound and determined to get that old tub out of there, and get it out in a hurry too. So to keep peace in the family Mr. Meyers finally agreed to do it, though against his will. And the plan was, after they sneaked the tub out on us, to take it off in Dad's car and sink it forever in an old well that they knew of.

That's why Dad had brought his car over—



EVERY TIME HE TRIED TO PULL THE BUCKET UP PEG
SOCKED IT DOWN WITH HIS PADDLE.

so Mr. Meyers wouldn't have to take his own car out again, for that might wake us up. And, of course, no one suspected then, not even Mrs. Meyers herself, that Red and I already were up.

And now I'll tell you just what happened.

Red and I were still in the cellar, you know. And there we stood staring at each other as the two men and Mrs. Meyers went out on the back porch for some final talk. Their voices were fainter than ever now. But we could make out that Mrs. Meyers was still coaxing about something. And then, as Red remembered about a cellar window on that side, and quietly got it open, the voices came in plain.

"All right, all right," growled Mr. Meyers. "Have your own way about it. But I still don't see what harm it does, or what there is about it to embarrass you so much."

"Well, I've told you how I feel about it," says Mrs. Meyers. "Why, I'd be mortified to death! Besides, I don't think it's sanitary, an old thing like that. And I want you to get rid of it. Then we can't have any more trouble over it, with that woman or anyone else."

"All right, all right," says Mr. Meyers, starting off in the dark. "We'll ease your mind. . . . Come on, Todd, and let's get it

over with. Then maybe I can have some peace around here. These finicky women! They give me a pain in the neck."

Red raised up and took a peek.

"They're going toward the barn," says he.

"Let me see," says I, raising up.

And then, when I saw that he was right, I took off for the stairs as fast as I could go. For I knew there was only one thing in that barn that troubled Mrs. Meyers. It was the old bathtub! And I knew too that she hadn't coaxed the men to go out there, in the middle of the night, to put a fancy ruffle on it, or something.

No, sir-ee! It was something that wasn't good for us. The bathtub, and our whole plan, was in danger. We had to save it. And at the same time I wanted to save my foolish pa from those nasty buckets.

But I was too late. And never, as long as I live, will I forget the way Mrs. Meyers stared at me as I came yelling out of the cellar, with Red hot after me, and tore by her through the kitchen door. I thought her eyes would pop out of her head. And then, as she got her voice, she came screaming after us to the barn.

“Charley! Charley!” she screamed.
“They’re coming.”

And it was then that the buckets came down from over the big door. Boy!—you never heard such a clatter and smash, and such yelling from men and boys, in all your life. For, of course, the minute the buckets fell, Peg and Scoop were up with their paddles. The Strickers had come at last!—so they thought. And they were into the fight in a jump.

Bang! It was Peg’s club landing on one of the buckets. At the same time there was a gurgling squawky yell. It was Mr. Meyers under the bucket. It was stuck on his head. And every time he tried to pull it up, to free himself, Peg socked it down with his paddle.

There was just enough light in the barn for Peg and Scoop to see the other squirming figures. And so the banging and yelling continued, with Mr. Meyers getting it one crack and my poor pa the next, till I got there and switched on the lights.

Peg told me afterwards that he socked Mr. Meyers seven times. And I don’t doubt it in the least. For when poor Mr. Meyers finally screwed himself out of the banged-up bucket, he took after Peg like a maniac.

Around and around the tub they went, Peg scooting along like a hunted deer, and Mr. Meyers bounding after him, completely crazy, while my pa at the same time tried to untangle himself from the spring of an old alarm clock that we had put on the door top between the buckets. We had put a couple of flat-irons up there too, and a lot more junk. And what poor Mr. Meyers and pa didn't have down their neck, and sticking in their ears, was on the floor.

It would have been swell for the Strickers. But I was sorry, of course, that my pa and Red's pa were the victims. Still, it was their own fault. Just because Adam gave in to Eve, in the Garden of Eden, and ate that apple against his will, is no reason why they had to listen to Mrs. Meyers and do everything she said. Really the fault was all hers. For she had been unreasonable. And when Mr. Meyers finally ran himself out of breath, going around the bathtub after Peg, and my pa got out of the clock spring, she was the one they turned on too—only, of course, my pa didn't say one-tenth as much as Mr. Meyers.

Yes, it was a mess if there ever was a mess. And the wonder is that the neighbors didn't turn in a riot call. Scoop took to the haymow, like a frightened monkey shinning up a pole,

when he saw Peg's plight. And that's where Peg himself wound up. From there they stared down pop-eyed, as the excitement continued. But I won't try to tell you everything that was said. For I don't think anybody would print this book if I put down everything that Mr. Meyers said.

But by one o'clock everything was still again. Mrs. Meyers had gone sniffing into the house, with her husband growling behind her, while Dad went home to wash out his smelly clothes. He knew now who the buckets had been put up for. And he had told me that he was sorry for butting in on us. He'd never do it again, he said. At the same time he wasn't so very nice to me either. And I don't think I could have been nice, if I smelt and felt like him. For how could a fellow be nice with a lot of stinking old cat water in the seat of his pants?

Poor pa! I watched him get spraddle-legged into the car and drive off. Then there was a wild scream in the house. I didn't know whether it was Mrs. Meyers stubbing her toe, or Mr. Meyers pitching the piano at her. But I kind of hoped it was the piano. For I was good and mad at her for what she had done.

But I figured this was the last. And that was a good thing for us. With everybody against

her now, even her own husband, she'd have to keep still about the tub, and keep away from it.

Well, as I say, everything quieted down at one o'clock. And with Peg and Scoop on one side of the bathtub, and Red and I on the other, we set about to finish our night's rest. But it was hard to get to sleep. First a giggle came up on one side of the tub, and then another giggle came up on the other side. There was scattered talk too about buckets and cat water and clock springs and flat-irons. And every time the clock spring was mentioned, or how Scoop went up the ladder pop-eyed, or how Peg did his stuff around the bathtub, there was a bunch of giggles. Oh, I was sorry for my pa, of course—I don't want you to think for a minute that I wasn't. But it wasn't our fault. And who wouldn't have giggled over it?

But the giggles got fewer and fewer. And finally we fell off. And now comes the queer part. Listen to this!

I woke up suddenly. I don't know what woke me up, but I did. One minute I was snoozing for all I was worth, with my legs tangled up with Red's. And the next minute I was staring wide-eyed.

My heart was thumping like sixty too. For I sensed danger of some kind. Was it the Strick-

ers? Were they creeping up on us in the dark, after letting Dad and Mr. Meyers get caught in the trap? Or was it someone or something else?

The big tower clock donged twice. Two o'clock! I had been asleep for an hour. And tired as I was when I dropped off, I knew I wouldn't wake up that way, in just one hour, if something near me hadn't caused me to wake up.

I had heard something in my sleep. Or something had touched me. And the more I thought about it the scareder I got. Yes, I'm telling you the truth. I was scared stiff. But I didn't yell. Nor I didn't reach for Red. I just lay there, breathless, waiting for something to happen.

There was a late moon. This is what had helped Scoop and Peg when the buckets tumbled down. And by this same faint light, as it wedged through the barn cracks, I finally picked out a moving figure. But it wasn't Bid Stricker. It was a big figure. It was a man! A great big man!

He came on, picking each step like a silent creeping panther, till he came to the bathtub. I could see him plainer now. And I saw him reach out and touch the tub. He ran his fingers

along the wooden rim. Then he lifted one end of it. He was trying it to see how heavy it was. And finding it was just made of tin, and not iron like most bathtubs, he braced himself for a big lift, and actually picked it up. Yes, sir, the whole thing. Just by himself. Which shows you how big and strong he was. And then, like a panther again, he started with it for the door.

I would have stopped the Strickers in an instant. But to tell you the truth I was scared of this bird. For what could a kid like me do against a man who could carry a whole bathtub? No, sir! I didn't want to mix up with him. And yet I wanted to save the tub. But how was I to do it?

He was at the door now. It was open a few inches. And he opened it wider with his foot. Then, with me still staring, like I was paralyzed, he went out, letting the door swing shut behind him.

It was a much bigger man than either Dad or Mr. Meyers. So I knew this wasn't another attempt of Mrs. Meyers' to get the tub away from us. But who could it be? Mr. Stricker? At the thought I got mad. And punching Red, I jumped up and pulled the rope.

That was the rope, you know, that we had

fixed up for Bid. But now it looked as though his father was going to get it instead. For I was dead sure now that it *was* Mr. Stricker. For who else would try to steal the tub that way in the middle of the night?

Red was up now, rubbing his eyes.

“Pa again?” says he, when he saw me up.

“No,” I panted. “It’s Bid’s pa.”

“Who?”

“Bid’s pa. He just went out with the tub.”

“Alone?” says Red, surprised.

“Yes.”

And all the time I was hanging to the rope, to keep it up tight.

Pretty soon I felt it jerk. The man had run into it. Then something fell outside. Then we heard a groan.

“Did you trip him up?” asked Red, hanging to me.

“Yes,” I told him.

“Gee! Maybe you broke his neck.”

“Get Peg,” says I. And I guess I was white now. Anyway I felt white. For I didn’t want to be the cause of a man breaking his neck. And except for that one groan outside, and the falling tub, I hadn’t heard a thing.

Peg and Scoop got up quietly. We whispered, excited. Then we went out together.

The bathtub was there on the ground. But the man himself was gone.

Peg picked up a felt hat.

"I never saw Bid's pa wear that," says he, as he turned the hat over in his hands.

"Let me see it," says I, reaching.

"Where did you find it?" Scoop asked Peg.

"Over there by the tub," says Peg.

We later took the tub inside, and locked ourselves in. And then, under the light, we looked the hat all over, satisfied now that it wasn't Mr. Stricker's. For it was a much better hat than he ever wore. Besides, it had the name of a Chicago dealer in it. And we knew that a poor man like Mr. Stricker wouldn't be likely to buy his hats in Chicago.

But if it wasn't him, who was it?

I told the fellows then what the man was like. He was a big man, I said. And he walked like a panther. But that's all I could tell. I didn't know whether he was black-headed or bald-headed or what.

But one thing—we knew he hadn't come there just for fun. He had some queer deep hidden interest in the old bathtub. And having tried to get it away from us once, he'd probably try it again.

So the answer was to either hide it, where he couldn't find, or keep constant guard over it.

Peg sat down beside it with his paddle.

"You fellows go to sleep," says he grimly, "and I'll watch till three o'clock."

The others lay down, and soon dropped off. But I sat up with Peg. For I was too excited to sleep. And too mystified. I couldn't figure out, for the life of me, why a man would try that way to steal a bathtub.

Of course, I knew why *we* wanted it. And I knew why Bid wanted it. But that was just kid stuff, after all. A man wouldn't think up a scheme like ours, or Bid's.

No, there was something else. And it was silly too to think that the man had tried to get the bathtub to use himself. For look at the swell hat he had left behind in his flight. It was a five-dollar hat anyway. And men in five-dollar hats don't usually have to steal a bathtub to get a bath.

At three o'clock Scoop got up, giving Peg a rest. But I still sat up. And I was still sitting there, beside the puzzling tub, at daybreak. It seemed to me that I had thought of everything that I could possibly think of. But I still couldn't figure out why a man in a five-dollar

hat should try to steal an old bathtub, just brought in from a public dump-pile.

Now, can you figure it out? If so, you're a better detective than me. Or if you can't, just read along and I'll tell you all about it.

CHAPTER IX

OUR NEW PLAN

MOTHER smiled at me all through breakfast. And once, behind Dad's back, she giggled. But I kept my eyes glued right on my plate. For I didn't know whether it was safe yet to do any giggling with Dad or not.

He went out right after breakfast. And then in wedged Mrs. Rail, puffing as usual, and with her apron hitched up on one side.

"I suppose you know, Mrs. Todd," she wheezed, as she dropped heavily into a kitchen chair, "that my Sammy got caught in that cold rain yesterday, and got soaked."

And then she glared at me!

"Yes," says Mother, "I heard about it, and how you had to go to Grandma Carey's house last night to get him."

"It's his story," wheezed Mrs. Rail, with her fat cheeks puffed out, "that he went to sleep in the rain. But *I* think someone pushed him in the creek."

And again I got a dirty accusing look!

Oh, hum! I hear her a lot at my house. For she comes over every day to gab. But what she says doesn't bother me any more.

"Oh, I don't think anybody pushed him in the creek," says Mother. "For Jerry tells the same story, about the rain."

"Oh, dear!" Mrs. Rail then sighed like a healthy furnace. "We had such wonderful neighbors when we lived on Elm street. As I was telling my husband this morning, when he was up in the bathroom gargling his throat, I was almost sorry, I said, that we ever moved away. For I never had to worry about Sammy going to sleep in the *rain* over there, or who he played with, or what he got dragged into by older neighborhood boys. But over here it's awful. It's got so I don't know, when he starts out in the morning, whether he'll come back with his tongue hanging in his mouth, or down behind like a tail—the awful bumps he gets, and the things he gets led into."

Which, of course, was just another polite crack at me!

Mother pressed my hand as she passed me by the sink with some dishes. For she knew I wasn't that bad.

"How is Sammy this morning?" she asked pleasantly.

“Still sniffing. But I suppose I’ll have to let him out for Sunday-school. For I had a terrible time with him last night to get him home from Grandma Carey’s house, after her asking him to stay. And I don’t want to cross him again.” Then she leaned forward, big-eyed. “But tell me!—what in the world happened over at the Meyers house last night? For I heard the awfulest scream over there, when I got up to grease Sammy’s chest. Honest!—it sounded just like her husband was dragging her around by the hair.”

“I’ll tell you some time,” says Mother, smiling.

And a meaning look must have passed between them. For Mrs. Rail said, “Oh! . . .” And when I looked up she was watching me quizzically.

Red and I went off together at Sunday-school time. And we got to looking at every man we met in the street to see if he had a limp, or acted lame in any way. For after that groan from the panther-man, as we now called him, we were pretty sure that he had hurt himself under the bathtub.

And just to make certain about Mr. Stricker we went around by the fire station, where he usually hangs out. He was just going in, with

a Sunday paper under his arm, but without the slightest trace of a limp. He had on the hat too that we knew so well.

“Howdy, boys,” says he, just as friendly as you please, as we stepped aside for him. Then he stopped, grinning. “I hear you give my kid a good lickin’,” says he, looking down at us.

“And did he tell you why?” says I, looking straight back at him.

“Yes, he said you claimed a bathtub he found, and took it away from him.”

“We found it first,” says I.

“That’s what I kind of suspected,” says he slowly.

And then he went on into the fire station, with a troubled look on his face, and sort of shaking his head to himself.

I never knew before that he was such a nice man. And I saw then that he didn’t like the things Bid did. It worried him.

Red and I were pretty sure now that if Mrs. Stricker did try to make trouble for us, as she had threatened, her husband would quiet her. And so we went on to Sunday-school feeling pretty good. We had our ups and our downs, but we were getting farther up all the time.

But we had no luck finding a big man with a new hat and a limp.

The bathtub was up in the haymow now. We had it hid under a lot of old rugs and other stuff. But as soon as we could we were going to get a better hiding place for it. For we'd never get it made into a portable bath-house if we had to keep it hid in the haymow. What we wanted was a secret place, where we could work on it off and on without the need of guarding it all the time. We already had our eyes on such a place. But we had to look it over first, to make sure, and then see the man who was the owner.

Red told me things were pretty dead at his house. It was so quiet, he said, that he had to pinch himself to make sure that he still had ears. For his mother had quit talking altogether. She went around just like a little lamb, he said, almost begging for a chance to wait on somebody. And his pa was laid up with a lame back. He overdid himself, I guess, chasing Peg around the bathtub. Or maybe one of the flat-irons struck him. But Red didn't know for sure. Like me, he wasn't asking any unnecessary questions around home, or attracting attention to himself. He was just going around as quiet as he could.

Grandma Carey came to church that morning. We saw her for a few minutes between church

and Sunday-school. But she couldn't help us. She couldn't think of a single reason, she said, as she puzzled over our story, why any grown man should try to steal our bathtub.

At Sunday-school Horse Foot was the last one in, as usual. He came strutting up the aisle sneezing, with a big red stocking wrapped around his neck. And pretty soon he got everybody to snickering. For he'd stop and look on one side, with a big monkey-like grin, and then he'd look on the other side. I got down out of sight, hoping he wouldn't see me. But I might just as well have yelled to him. For he came right for me, climbing over seven other kids to get to me, and acting like I was the long-lost brother that he had been searching for for the last sixty-seven years.

It's great to be popular. Oh, oh!

In class the teacher asked him what became of Noah and the ark. And what do you think he said! Gosh!—I thought I'd split. He said he chewed all the paint off Noah, when he was a baby, and his father stepped on the ark and broke it. That got the kids so stirred up that the teacher didn't call on him again. So he just sat there, counting Red's freckles, and sneezing.

At dinner Mrs. Rail rumbled in again tragically.

“Oh, dear! Oh, dear!” she took on, like she already had lost seven husbands with the croup, and now the last one was choking to death on a fishbone. “Did you hear about it, Mrs. Todd? Oh, dear! Oh, dear!”

“Why, no!—what?” says Mother anxiously.

“My Sammy! And you haven’t heard?—about the red stocking?”

“No. I don’t know what you’re talking about,” says Mother, puzzled.

“I do,” says I, grinning.

“Oh, dear!” Mrs. Rail got going again. “Wasn’t that terrible? And they told me he marched right up the middle of the aisle too, as big as cuffy—with that awful stocking on his neck. Why, I’m so mortified I could sink through a knothole.”

I thought it would take a pretty big knothole for her. But, of course, I didn’t say so.

Mother finally got the drift of things.

“And didn’t you know,” says she, smiling, “that Sammy had the stocking on his neck?”

“*Know?*” Mrs. Rail wheezed heavily. “Why, Mrs. Todd!—how can you ask? You should realize I wouldn’t send him off to Sunday-

school with one of my winter stockings on his neck. Of course I didn't know. I said to him, go upstairs, Sammy, and get a woolen cloth out of my dresser drawer, and keep it on your neck till you get to church. But I didn't want him to wear it *in* church. And certainly I never dreamed he'd pick out one of my red stockings."

I got up then, grinning, and wrote down a name out of the phone book. Then Red and I set out for a long walk. We went out the Treebury Pike, through Happy Hollow, as that part of town is called, and then followed a winding path to the top of College Hill. But we didn't go over where the college buildings were. Instead, we kept in back of them. And following a weedy fence, we came finally to an old boarded-up barn.

"Who did you say it belongs to?" says Red, as we walked around it in the weeds, and sized it up from all sides.

"Professor Something-or-other," says I, fishing for the paper with the name on it.

Red took the paper when I found it and read it.

"Professor Peer Van Goiter," says he.

"Not *Goiter*," says I quickly. "It's *Gorder*. Look at it again. Van *Gorder*."

“Well, it looks like Goiter,” he grinned.

“A goiter’s what you get in the neck,” I told him.

He laughed.

“A pain in the neck, huh? Well, I’ll let you talk to him—for all college professors give *me* a pain in the neck. They act like they live on dictionaries.”

“I think I’ll know him when I see him,” says I thoughtfully. “For he and Dad were on a committee one time. He’s a bushy-haired man, with hair like yours, and a big nose. He wears big shell-rimmed glasses too. And when he looks at you he makes you think he’s looking a hole right through you.”

“They all do,” says Red. “That’s why I hate to think of going to college.”

“But I think he’s a good guy,” says I. “For Dad likes him. And I think, when I tell him who I am, it’ll be all right about the barn. For he never uses it himself, as you can see. And I don’t see why he should kick at us using it, if we’re careful.”

“Well, you can do the talking,” says Red.

“I know that he’s the guy that owns it,” says I. “For I asked Dad one time what anybody ever built a barn out here for, all by itself. And he said it was a college professor’s

barn. And then he told me *what* college professor. So I know he's the right man to go to."

"But why *did* he build a barn out here?" asked Red, with a curious look at it.

"He didn't," says I. "It was built a long time ago by a farmer, whose house burned down. That left just the barn. Then Professor Van Gorder bought the land cheap. And here everything has stood since."

"Growing up to weeds, huh?"

"Yes, that's all the land's good for, I guess. Or maybe Professor Van Gorder is planning to give it to the college some time, for a football field, or something. I suppose he had some good reason for buying it, and then letting it stand. But, come on," I started off. "Let's see if we can get inside and look around."

"But what if he catches us?" Red spoke anxiously. "Gee!"

"*Him?*" says I, laughing. "Say, I bet he hasn't been near that barn for years. For look how he's got it boarded up. Come on."

Finding a loose window board, we pulled it back and crawled in. Then we went all over, through the stalls, where the horses and cows used to stand, and up in the low-roofed hay-mow, and every place. It was just an ordinary

barn like hundreds of other old barns of its kind. But standing all alone that way, and out in the country, it would make a swell workshop for us.

“Well, how do you like it?” I asked Red, as we came down from the haymow to the middle of the main floor.

And I guess my eyes told him how *I* liked it. For I thought it was swell.

“Oh, it’s all right,” says he. “But I’d hate to come out here in the dark. For don’t you think it smells kind of spooky?”

“Well, it’s been closed up for so long,” says I. “That’s what you smell.”

“And now you’re going over and see that guy with the goiter, huh?” Red laughed.

“You better keep still about the goiter,” says I, “or you’ll have me saying it too. And then we will get in bad.”

“And what if he says yes—what then? Tell me just what you’re going to do, Jerry.”

“Well,” I began, “I figure we ought to get the tub out of your barn and into some good hiding place, just as soon as we can. For it isn’t safe there, Red. So I picked out this place. If we come and go on the sly, the panther-man never will find it here. And I think it’s a good plan to get it away from your

ma too. For even though she's as nice as pie now, as you say, you never can tell what minute she's liable to steam over, like a volcano."

"Yes, that's so too," nodded Red.

"So I figure the best plan is to bring the tub out here. And then we'll get some old cart wheels, and everything, and go to work."

"But not at night, Jerry," Red spoke quickly.

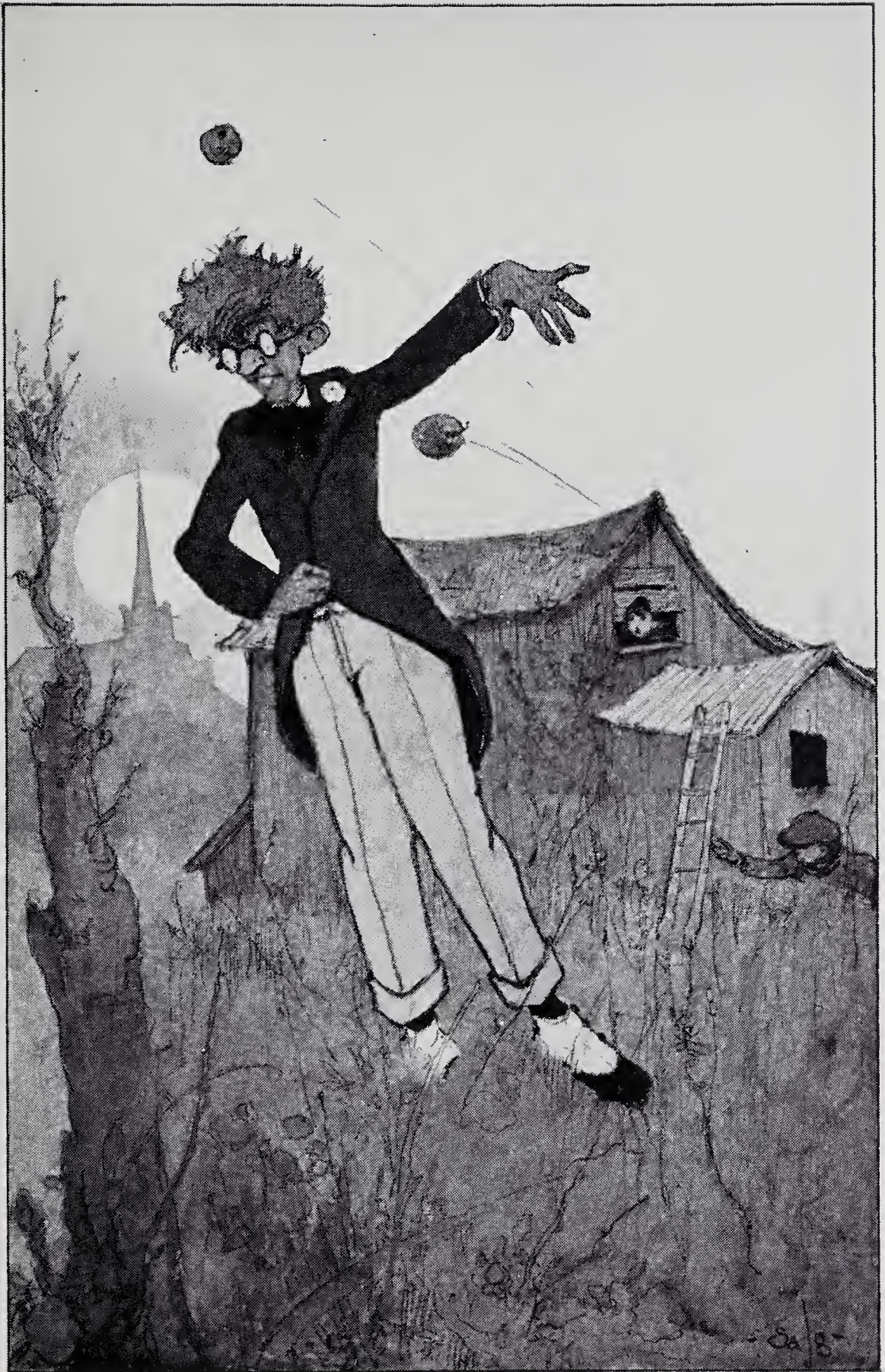
"Why not?" says I.

"Oh, I don't know," says he, shrugging. "But it seems awfully spooky out here to me. It's so quiet."

"You'll get over that," says I. "For there's nothing to be afraid of. And how can we hope to get the tub out here secretly if we don't move it at night?"

"All right," says he, nodding. "I'm with you, Jerry."

It *was* spooky in the barn, with the windows and doors boarded up that way, and everything so dark and stuffy. I had noticed it myself. But then, old places like that always are spooky, when you first go in. Everything is new to you. And you kind of have the feeling that something more familiar with the place than you are is liable to jump out and grab you. But I knew there was nothing here to jump



“GOSH,” SAYS RED, “HE ACTS CRAZY TO ME!”
Jerry Todd and the Buffalo Bill Bathtub

out. For we had been all through the place, from top to bottom. It was just a matter of getting used to things, as I had told Red. And then everything would be all right.

We crawled out then, to go find Professor Van Gorder. And having fixed the board behind us, just like we had found it, we started off in the direction of the college buildings, a short half-mile away.

We had heard the familiar tower clock strike when we were in the barn. And through the haymow cracks we had glimpsed the college steeples. But down on the ground everything was a clutter of weeds and underbrush. It was even hard to get through in places, and almost impossible to see through very far.

Coming to an opening, by some big trees, we saw a man ahead of us. And touching Red, I stopped.

“More luck,” says I, excited. “For that’s Professor Van Gorder himself.”

I recognized him by his bushy red hair and his shell-rimmed glasses. But I didn’t go up to him right off, to talk to him about the barn. For he had come out here by himself to practice a speech, or something. And I didn’t like to interrupt him.

It would be more mannerly, I thought, to wait till he got through, and then tackle him. So we got down where we could see without being seen. And there we watched, grinning. For what he was doing looked awfully silly to us. Still, I suppose it was all right. Even a smart college professor like him, I suppose, has to practice up that way by himself. Still, it *was* awfully silly. And we saw things we couldn't explain.

For one minute the man acted like he was talking to a bunch of dumb students. And the next minute he ran off into a poem, with a lot of crazy gestures. He couldn't have acted sillier if he had tried. And finally I began to wonder if he was all there. Which, of course, was a silly thought. For a man couldn't hold a job like his if he wasn't smart.

"Well, well," says he, bending over, sort of beaming-like, to talk to a bush. "So we're all together again, in the hall of learning. And I trust, my dear young ladies, that in the interim, between my last discourse on the Fauna of the Pre-Glacial Period, and this one, you have given as much time and thought to the decoration of the inside of your heads as to the outside. As for the young gentlemen pres-

ent, if you'll just bear with me, for a few minutes, I'm sure it won't be nearly as tiring as you anticipate."

"Gosh!" says Red, at the pause here. "I don't know whether I want to get any closer to that bird or not. For he acts crazy to me."

"That must be the way he talks to the students," says I, puzzled too.

"Yes, sure," says Red. "But what's his idea in coming out here on Sunday to practice it? Can't he do it enough on school days?"

There was more of it then. So we listened.

"These lectures are regrettable, I know," says the professor, as he walked up and down, as before a class, with one hand held importantly in the front of his coat. "For I know how they take up your valuable time, and keep you from your tennis and football. But bear with me, as best you can. For if we are to have colleges, of course we must have college professors too. And if we have college professors we must give them something to do, even talkative old wind-bags like myself. So! . . . Now to your notebooks. Let me see!—I think I was describing the effect of the aurora borealis upon the fauna of the pre-man glacial period. Now, going from there——"

But he didn't go very far. For just then that crazy Horse Foot came out of the bushes, with a stick, and jabbed him in the seat of his pants.

"S-s-say," says he, "where's Jerry Todd? I'm l-l-lookin' for him."

CHAPTER X

OUR TALK WITH THE PROFESSOR

I SUPPOSE it would startle anybody to be talking that way about the Fauna of the Pre-Glacial Period, or whatever it was, and suddenly get a jab in the seat of the pants.

But it seemed to me, as I crouched there watching the crazy performance, with Red beside me, that the college professor was more startled than he should have been. At most it was just an interruption. And he should have wheeled, scowling. Instead he actually jumped, as he turned. And if ever there was fear written on a man's face, it was his. But it was gone in a flash, when he found only a small boy behind him.

Horse Foot was going from side to side now, peeking mysteriously into the bushes.

“Sh-h-h!” says he, with a finger to his lips. “I’m d-d-detecting.”

Well, of all the crazy junk! And right there in front of that college professor, mind you. But that shows you how little he knows.

The professor was smiling now. And it wasn't a dictionary smile either, as you might say. It was a pretty good smile—almost boyish. I saw he wasn't a bit like I thought he would be.

"You're what?" he asked Horse Foot pleasantly.

"D-d-detecting," says Horse Foot, shading his eyes with one hand, for a better squint into the bushes. He made quite a show of it—or tried to.

"Oh! . . ." says the amused professor, comprehending. "Oh, yes—I see! A young detective! How interesting."

And he laughed pleasantly.

"D-d-did you see Jerry Todd?" Horse Foot then inquired, dropping his silly actions.

"No. I haven't seen anybody around here. Nor did I suspect that there *was* anybody here, till you appeared so—er—unceremoniously."

"S-s-so *what?*" says Horse Foot, looking up into the man's face.

"So unceremoniously," the big word was repeated. "That is, so abruptly—without the formality of a polite alarm."

"S-s-sure," wagged Horse Foot. "I l-l-like beans too. But I d-d-don't wear a wig."

“What’s that?” says the professor quickly.

“W-w-with ketchup,” tacked on Horse Foot.

“Oh! . . . I see! You’re rather a droll little chap, aren’t you?”

“My m-m-ma brags on me too,” says Horse Foot proudly, with his chest out.

“Yes!—I can imagine that she’s quite proud of you,” nodded the professor, more amused than ever.

Horse Foot looked around.

“But w-w-who were you talkin’ to?” he asked.

“Myself,” the professor admitted quietly.

“C-c-crazy people do that,” says Horse Foot.

“Yes,” smiled the professor, “that’s what I’ve heard. But I trust that I haven’t quite reached that stage yet.” Then he inquired: “But what made you suspect that Jerry Todd was near by?”

“I f-f-followed him,” admitted Horse Foot.

Yes, *he* would, all right!

“From town?” the professor asked, interested.

“S-s-sure.”

“And aren’t you the little boy who went to sleep in the bathtub?—the one they call Horse Foot?”

“S-s-sure,” came the proud reply. “H-h-horse Foot, the d-d-detective. W-w-who sees all and knows all.”

Horse Foot, the detective! Horse Foot, the *egg*, would have been a better name for him.

The professor, I thought, was pretty good to put up with it.

“I heard some of the students talking about you,” he spoke further to Horse Foot. “They seemed quite amused over your damp experience. . . . But what is Jerry Todd doing up here? Can you tell me?”

I turned to Red.

“I think we better go out and take a hand in this talk ourselves,” says I.

“O-k,” says he.

So out we stepped.

“H-h-hi,” says Horse Foot, happily, as we came up. “I know something.”

And he laughed queerly.

“I bet you thought he was crazy,” I spoke to the professor, who had watched our approach quizzically.

“To the contrary,” he spoke kindly, “I found him very droll and interesting. And you’re Jerry Todd?”

“Yes, sir. I thought maybe you’d remember me. For I met you one time at our house, when

you and my dad were on that highway committee."

"Oh, yes!—yes, of course," he spoke hastily, with a slight flush. "As a matter of fact I *do* remember you well. And your companion? . . ." he looked questioningly at Red.

"My name's Red Meyers," Red spoke for himself.

"I'm glad to meet you, Red," a cordial hand came out.

"The same to you," says Red, shaking.

"*He* isn't a real detective," I then told the professor, nodding toward Horse Foot, who was trying to see how high up he could spit on the trunk of a tree. "His uncle sent him a detective badge. And he just goes around thinking he's a detective. I think he's silly myself."

"M-m-me?" says Horse Foot, turning.

"Yes, *you*," I told him shortly. "And I want you to quit tagging me around too."

"B-b-boloney," says he, as he took another crack at the tree trunk.

"I fancied I was out here all alone," says the professor, with an odd smile. "But I see I had quite an audience."

"We thought you were rehearsing something," says I. "And we were waiting for you to get through."

“Yes?” the word was put as a question, for us to go on.

“We wanted to see you about that old barn,” I pointed back.

“Oh, yes!—yes! I see. You mean that old barn over there in the weeds?”

“We’ve just been over there looking around,” says I. “And if you don’t mind, we’d like to do some work over there. But we won’t bang up anything. And when we get through we’ll board it all up, just like we found it.”

“But—er—haven’t you boys a barn of your own in town? As I remember your neighborhood, Jerry, there were several barns scattered around.”

“Yes, I’ve got one myself,” says Red. “But we want a *secret* barn.”

“A secret barn?” the professor puzzled, studying our faces.

“I k-k-know,” Horse Foot came in. “It’s their b-b-bathtub.”

“The one you went to sleep in?” the professor smiled.

Horse Foot nodded.

“They want to h-h-hide it,” says he.

The professor sat down then and laughed. And he laughed so long that I wondered about

it. Finally he noticed that we were looking at him curiously, and got up.

“And is that what you want to use the barn for?” he asked me. “To hide your tub in?”

“Well, that’s partly it,” says I.

Then I told him the whole story, starting with us finding the bathtub on the dump-pile, and ending with the panther-man’s attempt to steal it.

“But you mustn’t tell anybody,” I wound up. “You won’t, will you?”

“Positively not,” he gave me his firm promise. And I had the feeling that he wanted to sit down and laugh again, but he kept himself in check for fear we might wonder about it.

He was plenty queer, all right. But he was an easy man to talk to.

“Then you *will* let us use the barn?” I asked, eagerly.

“I think so,” he nodded. “And you know, of course, who I am.”

“Oh, yes,” says I. “You’re Professor Van Gorder.”

“Exactly,” he spoke concisely, with a pleased nod. “Yes,” he added thoughtfully, “I see no objection to your using the barn. But I’d suggest that you keep your movements there as secret as possible. It might be advisable even

to leave all the doors boarded up except the big one in back, where you can go in and out."

He paused.

"You see," he added, "there has been some trouble in our family over that property. That's why it stands there unused. And I'd rather not have my wife, or any other member of the family, know that the barn has been opened."

"And can you get us the key to the big door?" says I.

"No," he shook his head. "My wife has the key. But it's a common padlock, as you'll find when you come to examine it closely. And you have my permission to pick it, or even break it open, if you'll replace it when you're through."

Gee! I guess you can imagine how tickled we were. He sure was a swell man, all right. And Red had called him a pain in the neck!

But he had said one thing that puzzled me.

"You just told Horse Foot," says I, "that the students knew about him going to sleep in the bathtub. But how did they find out about it?"

"How do students find out so many things outside of their own circle of activities?" was his evasive reply.

With that he started off toward the college, but stopped abruptly.

“And one more thing,” says he gravely.

“Yes, sir,” says I politely.

“If you have to see me about anything, at my home, don’t mention the barn, unless I come to the door myself.”

“But what if somebody else comes to the door?” says I.

And all the time I was thinking to myself that he was making an awful mystery about that old barn. For why should a thing like that cause any family arguments?

Still, I didn’t know much about college professors and their ways.

“Should my wife, or the maid, answer your ring,” he then told us, “simply say, monkeys have green toenails.”

“What?” says I, staring.

“Monkeys have green toenails,” he repeated. “Surely you can remember that, can’t you—a big boy like you?”

“But aren’t you fooling?” says I, bewildered.

“Positively not.”

And when I searched his face, it was just as sober as sober could be.

“Monkeys have green toenails,” I repeated. And I felt silly saying it.

“Yes,” he nodded, with satisfaction, “that’s it. Just say that to my wife, or the maid—monkeys have green toenails. And then wait for me at the door.”

“But won’t your wife think I’m silly?” says I, still wondering at it.

“My entire menage,” says he, with an air of severe authority, “is used to my eccentric ways. So see that you carry out my instructions to the letter, however silly they may sound to you, or else this new friendship of ours may end disastrously.”

He went on then, showing that he was through. And at the same time we started, in the other direction, for home.

“What’s a menage?” says Red, as we walked along, puzzled.

“Gosh!—I don’t know,” says I, at sea.

“You can’t tell me,” waggled Red, looking back, “that college professors aren’t a pain in the neck. Monkeys have pink toenails!”

“Green,” says I.

“I don’t think they got any toenails at all,” grunted Red, disgusted.

We puzzled about it all the way home. And I kept wondering too how the students had found out about Horse Foot and the tub. I never thought the Tutter College students paid

any attention to us. I thought we were just kids to them, and beneath their notice. And yet the professor had said that the students knew about Horse Foot going to sleep in the bathtub, and even had laughed among themselves about it!

It sure was queer, all right. And that toenail business too. It gave us plenty to wonder about.

“Now listen, Sherlock Holmes,” I went at Horse Foot, when we came to his house, “if you say a single word to your ma or anybody else about us talking to Professor Van Gorder, or about his barn, or us taking the bathtub there, or monkeys, or *anything*, I’ll break your neck. Do you get that?”

“P-p-pickled pigs feet,” says he.

“Are you listening?” I scowled.

“H-h-ham and gravy,” says he.

And then he ran into the house laughing.

The crazy little nut! But I felt I could trust him, all right. For I hadn’t found him to be a tattler yet. And that’s the one thing that saved him in my eyes. For you can stand a lot from a little kid like that if he just doesn’t tattle. We’re all kids some time, and have to grow.

“And when shall we start moving our stuff

up there then?" I asked Red, as we separated.

"I don't think ma'll let me do it to-night," says he. "Not on Sunday."

"All right then," says I. "To-morrow night, how's that?"

"O-k," says he.

"We'll take the bathtub up first, on my coaster wagon," I planned. "Then we'll lug the other stuff up piece by piece."

"And go up there every night after school to work, huh?" Red beamed.

"That's my plan," says I, nodding.

"But, Jerry," he spoke earnestly.

"Yes?"

"It's getting awfully chilly for a portable bathtub."

"I know it," says I. "But we'll go ahead and finish it anyway. And if we decide it's too cold to use it then, we'll just wait till next summer."

Dad could almost smile at me that night. So I knew everything would be all right in a day or two.

I got a good report from Red's house too.

"Well the miracle's over," says he, laughing, when I met him after supper. "Ma's got her voice back. She just ripped me up the back for drizzling syrup on the kitchen floor. And

pa got it for dropping an aspirin in the goldfish globe."

"The poor goldfish!" I laughed.

"Yes," he laughed too, "I guess they don't like aspirin very much. For they all turned up on their sides. And now ma's setting over there with them in a dish pan, trying to teach them to swim again."

"Do you know," says I, jerking my head, "I won't rest easy till we get that bathtub out of her reach. For she's so blamed changeable. And I bet you, if the truth was known, she hates it now worse than ever, after getting fooled that way."

"I've been thinking that myself," wagged Red. "But I can't do anything till to-morrow night, Jerry. For I've had orders to be home, and in bed, by eight o'clock."

Like Red, I turned in early that night, sleeping like a log. On the way to school the next morning I stopped to get him. His ma was scolding about the furnace. For she couldn't build a fire in it, or something, on account of the grates. And she made Mr. Meyers promise to fix them that night after school, when we'd be there to help him.

The bathtub was all right, Red told me on the sly. He had run up to see as soon as he

got up. It was still all right at noon too, and again after school.

Mr. Meyers was waiting for us when we got home from school. But there wasn't much that we could do to help him, except to stand around and hand him wrenches and things. And toward the last he got peeved at us and told us to get out. He didn't like it because we snickered when he got his head stuck in the furnace door. He said if he needed any more help he'd call on Horse Foot, who was there too. But we didn't get clear out. We just went up the cellar stairs and sat down.

"It's a wonder your ma isn't down here to boss things," I told Red, as we sat there listening to Mr. Meyers thumping away in the furnace.

"Oh, she got froze out," says Red, "and went over to the neighbors."

"And does she know we're going to move the tub to-night?"

"Listen, boy!—I haven't said a word to her about that tub since Saturday night."

"But how are you going to get out?" I asked.

"Oh, I told her I had some work to do."

"I bet she'll be watching," says I.

"Well, let her watch," says he indifferently.

“We can go up the alley. And she can’t see us that way.”

“What time?” says I. “About eight o’clock?”

“Yes, if you think it’s dark enough then.”

So it was agreed that we were to start off secretly with the bathtub at eight o’clock. But neither of us dreamed then of the crazy stuff that was going to happen before then, with Mr. Meyers actually getting into the tub, mind you, to take a bath, and paying us for it too.

CHAPTER XI

MR. MEYERS' PREDICAMENT

MR. MEYERS was in and out of the furnace a dozen times while we sat there watching, at the head of the cellar stairs. And boy!—was he dirty! He had put on an old pair of coveralls for the job, which now were black with soot to the waist. As for his head, there was so much soot on it we couldn't tell which side was which, except where it stuck out in front, where his nose was.

"He ought to get a job with Amos 'n' Andy," I laughed.

"Yes, I've just been wondering," says Red, "how he'll ever get clean. For soot like that sticks like the dickens. He'll need plenty of soap and water."

"But what's he trying to do anyway?" says I. "Break the grates?"

"Yes, so they'll drop in the ash-pit, and he can put some new ones in. For he can't get them out any other way—they're so warped."

Mr. Meyers came out then, to dig some of the

furnace dirt out of his eyes, and get an iron bar that lay on the floor.

“Hand it up,” he told his helper, blinking.

But during the past few minutes Horse Foot had discovered that the furnace had a name on it, over the fuel door.

“R-o-u-n-d,” he spelt out slowly. “O-a-k.” Then he turned, beaming. “I b-b-bet that spells oak tree,” says he, very happy over his own smartness.

“Oak tree?” snorted Mr. Meyers. “Oh, no,” he grinned sootily, as he reached for the bar himself, “o-a-k doesn’t spell oak tree. That spells hickory tree.”

Horse Foot went back to the name, puzzled.

“O-a-k,” he spelt again. “But I t-t-thought—” he began.

“You aren’t supposed to think,” grunted Mr. Meyers. “You’re just a helper. And now, *move*,” he ordered roughly, “so I can get in there again. For I want to get this pesky job finished before supper.”

But instead of moving aside, as told, Horse Foot bent closer to peek in the furnace himself.

“B-b-but where’s the fire?” he asked, surprised.

Red and I giggled so hard at that, that we almost fell down the cellar stairs. Where was

the fire!—and Mr. Meyers had just taken his head out! But we caught our balance in a jiffy, and flew the other way, when Mr. Meyers, hearing us, took after us with a paddle.

“And close that door too,” he boomed after us, up the stairs.

So we banged it nice and loud, for his benefit. Then we slyly opened it again and listened.

“Is it b-b-busted?” asked Horse Foot.

“Oh, no,” says Mr. Meyers, as he came out to clean his eyes again. “It isn’t broken. I’m just trying to play a tune on it.” And going in again, with a hammer, he started banging and singing at the top of his voice. He’s full of crazy things like that—just like Red. That’s why the two are so well-liked, I guess. But, gosh!—as well as I knew Mr. Meyers, and his comical ways, I never thought he’d start singing in *there*, all dirty like that, and cranky.

“Oh, Columbia the gem of the ocean,” he whooped it up, banging in time, “the home of the brave and the free.”

And he put in so much extra pep on the “home of the brave” part, and got in so many extra pounds, that the pipes going out from the furnace rattled all through the house.

Here a door opened and closed behind us, letting in a gust of cold air.

“Oh, oh!” says Red, wheeling. “Ma’s come.”

Mrs. Meyers got her eyes on us right off, and came over suspiciously.

“And now what?” says she tartly. “What new mischief is this?”

“Sh-h-h!” says Red, with a finger to his lips. “Don’t break up the concert, ma.”

“Concert?” says she, looking at us in turn. “What concert?”

“Well, can’t you hear it?” laughed Red.

“Is that your father?” she asked, surprised, as the singing and pounding continued.

“Yes, he’s putting on a concert in the furnace.”

“—a world offers homage to thee,” Mr. Meyers whooped it up below.

And there he must have banged his fingers. For he ended suddenly with something that wasn’t in the song.

“Mercy me!” gasped Mrs. Meyers, reddening. “Is that man loony?”

And pushing us aside, she flew down the stairs.

“Br-r-r!” says she, when Mr. Meyers drew his sooty head out to see who it was. “The house is like an ice-box.”

“Well,” he grimaced, “I can’t fix the fur-

nace with a fire in it. For I'm no salamander."

"And what's a salamander?" I asked Red, when his mother had gone out to the neighbors again, to warm up.

"Go ask your college professor," says he.

"Say!" says I quickly. "I found out what a menage is. I looked it up in the dictionary. It's his house, or household, or something."

"Well, why didn't he say so?"

"Oh, he just wanted to talk big, I guess."

"Well, I still think he's crazy," grunted Red. "Huh! Monkeys have pink toenails! If *that* isn't crazy, I don't know what is."

"You always get it *pink*," says I impatiently. "And it isn't pink, it's *green*."

"Yes, and you're green to swallow it," says he. "But let's go out and get the tub down," he suggested, with more interest. "What do you say?"

"Yes, let's get it down now," I agreed, "so we won't have to do it in the dark."

But the ringing phone stopped us.

"It's for you, pa," Red called down the stairs.

Mr. Meyers was pounding so hard he never heard.

"Hey, pa," Red yelled louder. "Come on up. Someone's on the phone for you."

"Oh, tell your ma to answer it—for I can't come up now."

"But ma's gone."

"Oh, shucks! Some silly phone call, I suppose."

"It's that man you go to lodge with on Monday night," Red informed.

"Oh! . . ." Mr. Meyers' voice changed. "Whipple, huh?"

"Yes, he wants you to do something down to the lodge to-night—a lecture or something."

"Oh, I know!—initiation. Yes, tell him I'll be there."

Red ran back.

"Hello, Mr. Whipple. . . . No, he can't come up himself, for he's fixing the furnace, and he's all dirty. But I told him, and he said he'll be there. . . . When? Yes, I'll tell him. Good-by."

"Did you tell him?" Mr. Meyers called up the stairs.

"Yes, I told him, pa. And he wants you to be there in time for supper at six o'clock—a chicken-pie supper."

"Oh, boy!" Mr. Meyers perked up. "That's good news. And what time is it now?"

"A quarter after five."

"Well, I'll have to hurry, to get there at

six. But, boy!—I wouldn't miss that chicken-pie supper, if I had to jump seven ways at once."

"And aren't you pretty near through?" asked Red.

"Yes, I'll be able to start a fire in a few minutes."

"Well, I'm going out in the barn, pa, if you happen to want me."

"And where did you say your ma is?"

"I think she went over to Jerry's house, to get warm."

"Well, you can put some water on for me, if you want to, and start it to heating."

"On the gas stove?" asked Red.

"Yes, I'll have to carry it upstairs to the tub. For there won't be any hot water in the furnace coil for an hour yet."

So we got out two big dish-pans, and filled them up. And having set them on separate burners, going full blast, we went to the barn to bring the tub down, Horse Foot going along to help.

"And c-c-can I go to-night, Jerry?" he asked eagerly, as we pulled the tub out of its hiding place, in the haymow, and dragged it to the head of the stairs, where we had a rope ready to slide it down.

“No,” says I flatly.

For I was tired of him tagging along. And we were going to be too busy to monkey with him then.

“Aw, p-p-please,” he coaxed, getting in front of me and looking up just like a begging dog. “I l-l-like you, Jerry. P-p-please.”

“I said no,” I told him, with a shove. “And now shut up about it. For I don’t think your ma’d let you go anyway.”

“S-s-sure,” says he quickly, as he got in front of me again.

“Well, you needn’t ask her,” says I. “For we don’t want you.”

“Unless—” says Red thoughtfully.

“Unless what?” I grunted.

“Unless he goes behind and watches.”

“That’s not such a bad idea either,” says I, thinking.

“I’d feel safer,” says Red, “if we had someone behind us. Then we’d know if we’re followed.”

“Do you hear that, Horse Foot?” says I.

“S-s-sure,” says he happily.

“And do you think you can follow us, and keep out of sight?”

“L-l-last Saturday I did,” he grinned.

“All right then,” says I. “You be around

at eight o'clock. And listen!—don't get too close to us. Keep a block behind, if you can, without losing us. And if you see anybody following us, hoot like an owl."

Red laughed.

"I never heard of a stuttering owl," says he.

"Let's hear you," I told Horse Foot.

"H-h-hoot!" he let out, with his face puckered up like he had been eating sour crabs.

"You'll do," I grinned.

Getting the tub down safely, we put it near the door, handy, and then went back to the house, where Mr. Meyers was trying frantically to get his wife on the phone.

For he had just found out that the bath-room door was locked.

Red and I ran up to see, to make sure. But it was locked, all right. And we could smell varnish under it.

"I know," says Red. "Ma's been varnishing in there, and locked it up."

"But what did she do with the key?" Mr. Meyers asked wildly, when we got downstairs again. For he was crazy to think that he might miss that chicken-pie supper.

"I don't know," says Red.

"Gosh! I've phoned to Jerry's house and every place else to find her, but I can't. So

see if you boys can find her. And don't take all year about it either. For I've got to be down to lodge in twenty minutes."

Red and I ran through the neighborhood like wildfire. But everywhere we stopped, the people shook their heads. And rather than keep Mr. Meyers waiting forever, we ran back, to see if we couldn't help him pick the bathroom lock, or something. For there ought to be some way of getting in there, we told ourselves.

Horse Foot came tumbling out of my house as we passed.

"S-s-she ain't there, Jerry," says he, excitedly.

"I knew that before we started out," says I.

"S-s-so did I," says he.

"Then what'd you stop for?" I asked, wondering more than ever at his dumb ways.

"T-t-to make sure," says he.

And with that he was off down the street in further excited search.

Mr. Meyers was watching for us from the kitchen window. And I guess he could tell by our manner that we didn't have the key. For he looked pretty sick when we came in.

"Couldn't find her, huh?" he spoke without spirit.

“No,” says Red.

“Well, I guess it’s all off,” says he, giving up. “No chicken-pie supper for me to-night.” And he turned the fire off under the steaming water pans and sat down.

“Oh, we may find a key that fits,” says Red hopefully, darting up the stairs.

But Mr. Meyers just sat there dejected.

“Too late now,” says he, nodding at the clock, which said ten minutes to six. “I’ll just sit here till your ma gets home.”

But Red tried anyway, getting all the keys in the house. But none worked.

“But I tell you what you can do, pa,” says he, running down again.

“What?” says Mr. Meyers.

“You can use our tub, in the barn, if you think it isn’t too cold out there.”

“That old cat tub?” Mr. Meyers turned up his sooty nose.

“Aw, that’s just ma’s talk,” growled Red. “It’s just as clean as any other tub, pa. Honest! And if you don’t believe me, you just ask Jerry. For he saw me scrubbing it out. Didn’t you, Jerry?”

“Sure,” I bobbed quickly. “You had a big scrubbing brush. And now it’s just as clean as you’d want it, Mr. Meyers.”

Red got in some of his sly stuff then, to help the case along.

“I know *I* wouldn’t miss a nice chicken-pie supper,” says he craftily, “for a measly quarter.”

“Quarter?” says Mr. Meyers.

“Well, you wouldn’t be cheap about it, would you,” says Red, “and not pay us?”

“Oh! . . . You think you’re going to make a quarter, huh?”

“Well, you wouldn’t gyp us, would you? And what’s a quarter—a measly little quarter—for a nice big chicken-pie supper? Why, I bet they got chicken pies down there six inches thick. And just think of the gravy, and the mashed potatoes! Um . . .”

Mr. Meyers thought of it and looked at the clock, with renewed hope. Then he went and looked outside.

“I don’t think I’d freeze at that,” says he.

“Of course you wouldn’t,” says Red quickly. Then he started off with one of the hot-water pans, nodding to me to take the other. “And you can bring the towel, pa, and some soap.”

“Just a minute,” says Mr. Meyers, as the phone rang.

So we stopped, waiting.

“Oh, is that you, Whipple? . . . Say, I’m

in a mess over here. But, say!—listen! I think I can get down there by six-thirty, if there'll be anything left. . . . What's that? . . . Oh, boy! Oh, boy! Oh, boy! Yah, I'll be there with bells on. So-long, old-timer! And thanks for calling."

"And what's so good?" asked Red.

"They're late with the supper. I've got a whole half-hour yet."

And grabbing a towel, and some soap, he went out singing.

But he didn't go out very far. For there, standing just outside the door, was Mrs. Meyers. She had been listening.

"I heard you, Charley Meyers," she bounced in, to take charge. "And you're *not* going to take a bath in that mangy old cat tub. So trot right back now with that towel. And you, Donald—put that water back on the stove. And you too, Jerry."

Red set up a fearful howl.

"Oh, there goes our first quarter!" he howled. "Oh, gee! Oh, fish-hooks!"

For he thought, of course, that Mrs. Meyers would open up the bath-room now, and Mr. Meyers would go ahead with his bath there, and that's all there would be to it.

But wait till I tell you. Gee!

CHAPTER XII

OUR FIRST CUSTOMER

ONE minute we had a quarter, and our bathtub business was going swell. And the next minute the quarter was gone! And all on account of that old Mrs. Meyers!

Oh, I know I shouldn't talk that way about her—my own chum's mother and a neighbor and everything. But, gee!—a fellow hates to have someone butting in all the time, and spoiling things for him. And that's what she was doing. First she made fun of us about our scheme—a silly old bathtub and a silly old scheme and everything!—then she tried to get the tub away from us on the sly, and now she wouldn't let Mr. Meyers get in it, after we had it all fixed to rent it to him for a quarter.

I didn't wonder Red howled about fish-hooks. I felt like howling myself. And I guess I looked pretty mad as I stamped in and banged my pan of water back on the stove. But I suppose it didn't help any, scowling.

Most times Mrs. Meyers is all right. I'm go-

ing to say that for her. I've had a lot of fun around her. And I've even thought I'd like to have her for a ma if I should ever be so unlucky as to lose my own. But I didn't want her now. I guess not! I wished she was on an island some place in the middle of the Indian ocean.

"It's come to a pretty pass," she stormed, as she came in, herding us before her, "that I can't step out of my own house for two minutes at a time without coming back to find you sillies fooling around with that mangy old cat tub. As for you, Charley Meyers, you're old enough to know better. And I'm ashamed of you. The very idea! A man, like you, washing in a mangy old cat tub—just to fill your stomach on chicken pie. You'd think that chicken-pie supper was the only thing that mattered. But I'm here now. And I'll see that you take your bath where you belong."

"Well, give me the key," says Mr. Meyers sourly, "and quit jawing about it."

She looked blank.

"The key?" says she, staring. "What key? What are you talking about?"

"Why, the bath-room key, of course. You've got it, haven't you?"

"Oh! . . ." says she, acting like she had just

thought of something that didn't make her feel so good.

"Oh," Mr. Meyers' eyes narrowed as he spoke, "so you forgot about going off with the bath-room key, huh. And then you growl at me because I have to find some other place to wash up. I think, after this, you better find out who's at fault, instead of just jumping on a fellow."

Mrs. Meyers was like a toy balloon now, with half the air out.

"But I thought you were just helping those silly boys," she spoke almost meekly.

"Well, let's have the key," Mr. Meyers spoke impatiently, reaching for it.

"Oh, dear!" she puckered up her forehead. "What *did* I do with that key?"

That decided matters for Mr. Meyers.

"Come on, boys," says he, starting grimly for the door. "I can't wait any longer."

"Oh, but, Charley!—please!" Mrs. Meyers begged. "You'll get sick, washing out there in the cold."

"Well, I've got to wash some place," says he practically. "And I haven't got all night to do it in either."

"Oh, dear!" Mrs. Meyers puzzled. "Where *did* I put that key?"

“Haven’t you got a pocket?” asked Mr. Meyers.

“Yes, but it isn’t there. I just felt. I must have put it down some place.”

“Well, I don’t see why you locked it anyway,” Mr. Meyers growled impatiently.

“But, Charley!” came the weak defense. “I just varnished the floor. And I wasn’t going to have it all tracked up before it dried.”

“Well, have you thought where the key is?” he kept at her.

“Dear me! You’ve got me so rattled I don’t know anything.”

Red had the doorknob ready.

“I thought you were coming, pa,” says he slyly.

“Well, he isn’t coming,” Mrs. Meyers stiffened again. “And you needn’t try to coax him either, and pull on him. For I’m watching you,” she added.

“But I’ve got to wash some place,” Mr. Meyers spoke for himself, all out of patience now. “And look at the time! Suffering cats! I’ve been monkeying around here for a half hour.”

“Shall I carry the water for you, pa?” Red asked eagerly.

And you know, of course, what *he* was after!

He wanted to get his pa in that tub, just as I did, so we'd get the quarter.

"Donald Meyers!" his mother went at him. "I'm going to shake you right out of your pants, if you don't quit egging your pa on. For he's *not* going to wash in that mangy old cat tub."

"It isn't a mangy old cat tub either," Red rose quickly to its defense. "It's just as good as any other tub."

"It *is* a mangy old cat tub," his mother came back flatly, "for the Strickers washed cats in it. You told me so yourself. And I'm surprised that a sensible boy like you would coax your father to wash in a thing like that, just to get a quarter."

"He didn't coax me," Mr. Meyers spoke on Red's side.

"Well, then you must be getting soft in your upper story," his wife told him heatedly.

"And what do you want me to wash in anyway?—a thimble? I've got to be down to lodge in a few minutes—and look at me!"

"Dear me!" Mrs. Meyers puzzled, for about the tenth time. "Where *did* I put that key?"

Red winked happily.

"Gee, Jerry! Maybe we'll get the quarter yet—if ma can't find the key."

“Yes,” Mr. Meyers spoke briskly to his wife, “hurry up and make up your mind about that key. For I can’t wait here forever. For look at the clock! There won’t be anything left but chicken necks and gizzards, when I get there.”

“Well, if you’d just quit pestering me—so I can think. The key can’t be far off.”

“How about the cupboard?” he suggested. “I’ve seen you put keys there before.”

She started over.

“Well, I don’t think it’s there, but I’ll look.”

“Yes,” says Red, “and I hope it isn’t.”

“Well, it won’t make any difference whether it is or not,” she spoke back sharply. “Your pa isn’t going out in that cold barn to wash, and that’s final.”

“Well, is it there?” Mr. Meyers waited for his wife to say something, at the cupboard.

“No,” she admitted reluctantly.

“Then here’s where I head for the barn. Come on, boys.”

And he meant business too. He showed it.

“Oh, goody, goody!” Red danced along.

Mrs. Meyers sat down wearily.

“Listen—all of you,” says she quietly.

“And what now?” growled Mr. Meyers, turning.

“You know how I feel about that tub,” she

went on, in an even resigned voice. "I thought it was silly of the boys ever to bring it home in the first place. And that Buffalo Bill talk of theirs didn't make it any the less silly to me. I'm afraid of what might be in it too. For any kind of germs can get into an old thing like that. But rather than have you go out in the barn, and run the chance of getting sick, I'll give in. If you *must* take a bath in it, Charley, bring it in here."

Gee! I could hardly believe my ears. Nor Red either. For certainly we never had expected anything like that to happen.

"Honest, ma?" says Red, running back for a closer look at her weary face. "Do you mean it?"

"I'm through fussing about that tub," says she. "You know how I feel about it. And if you don't think enough of me, to respect my views, I'll just sit aside and let you do as you please. For I'm *not* going to wear myself out over a silly old bathtub."

Red threw his arms around her.

"Oh, ma! We won't bring it in, if you feel that way. And pa can go over to Jerry's and wash."

"Sure!" Mr. Meyers furthered the idea. "We aren't going to bother you with that old

tub, honey. I can get a wash-tub up from the cellar. It's a wonder I didn't think of it before."

"But you can't, Charley—I've got clothes soaking in it. So go ahead and get that other tub, as you planned. I suppose it's cleaner than I thought. At least I give you credit for knowing what you're washing in."

"And what now, pa?" Red stood expectantly.

"Well," Mr. Meyers spoke slowly, "if your mother doesn't mind—I think it *would* be pretty cold out in the barn. Or we can take it down cellar, by the furnace."

"No," says Mrs. Meyers firmly. "I'd rather you washed here. For I can mop up easier here."

"Oh, gee, ma!" Red gave her another rough hug, for it worried him the way she was acting. Her spirit was all gone. "You aren't mad at me, are you, ma?"

"No. But I'm terribly disgusted with you, Donald!—you and your silly Buffalo Bill talk."

"Well, I can promise you one thing," he wagged vigorously. "You won't have the tub around here to bother you much longer."

"Why?" she asked quickly. "What are you going to do to it?"

“Well,” he evaded, “you won’t have it here to bother you anyway. Just remember that.”

“And, Mrs. Meyers,” I spoke soberly.

“Yes, Jerry.”

“I was awful mad at you, when you first came in. And I thought all kinds of mean things about you. But I’m sorry now.”

“Bless your heart!” says she, patting me on the head. “But hurry now, and get the tub, so that Donald’s pa can get cleaned up and away in time for that supper.”

I pinched myself when I was outside.

“Is it real?” I asked Red. “Or am I dreaming?” I added.

“Well,” he grinned impishly, “I think it’s real. But we’ll know for sure when we try to take the tub in.”

Mr. Meyers was waiting at the back door to help us.

“Go easy now,” says he, as we went in, “and don’t scrape the door-casing.”

Mrs. Meyers took a long look at the tub, when we set it down in the middle of the floor, and sighed.

“I never dreamed,” says she, “that I’d ever see that thing in my house.”

“But it isn’t so bad now, is it, ma?” Red asked happily. “Now, tell the truth.”

“Oh, it could be worse, I suppose. But just the same I’ll be glad when it’s gone. And I think you’d better put plenty of newspapers down. For I know how your pa splashes. He’s just like a sparrow.”

“Sure,” Red jumped for the newspapers. “We’ll get everything fixed up swell, ma.”

When the newspapers were down, around the tub, and the plug put in tight, we carried the hot water over. Then we poured in cold water, till Mr. Meyers told us to stop.

He was halfway out of his coveralls now.

“All right,” says he, shooing us off. “Clear out now. For I’m in a hurry.”

“But what if the phone rings?” says Mrs. Meyers.

“Let it ring.”

“But I’m expecting a call—and one of us has got to answer it.”

“And, pa!” Red put in eagerly.

“And are *you* expecting a call too?” growled Mr. Meyers, scowling, as he stood ready to drop his dirty coveralls as soon as we got out.

“No,” Red grinned. “But I thought maybe you might want to pay your debts now.”

“Oh, you’ll get that quarter all right—Shylock! But now, for Pete’s sake, go park yourself some place else, so I can clean up. Any-

body'd think you were all putting on a family reunion around here.

"But why don't you pay me now, pa?" Red hung on.

"My money's all upstairs."

"Well, I'll get it," Red offered eagerly.

"Yes, you'll get it all right—and good and plenty too, right on the seat of your pants—if you don't get out of here, like I tell you."

"And when are we going to eat, ma?" Red looked across at his mother.

"Oh," she smiled, "I suppose we'll have to wait till father gets through sozzling his knees."

"Yes, and I wish you'd all move, so father could start sozzling his knees," Mr. Meyers stormed. "And what's the matter with *you*, Jerry?" he turned to the door, where I stood waiting with my hand on the knob. "Stuck to the floor?"

I got out then. For I figured I'd better.

"I'll see you after supper," I told Red.

"Wait a minute," says he, running over. "I've got something to tell you."

"What?" I asked, when we were outside on the porch.

"I wish I could dress up like a woman," he giggled.

"What for?"

“Oh, I’d like to walk in on pa, and see him swallow his tonsils. Gee! Wouldn’t that be funny?”

“You better leave him alone,” says I. “For he’s kind of cranky.”

“And weren’t you surprised, Jerry, when ma gave in about that tub? Gosh! I thought I was getting batty, for a minute or two. I couldn’t believe it was so.”

“Your ma’s all right,” I waggled.

“Sure, she is,” says he. “But, Gosh!—I never dreamed I’d ever see that old tub in there. Things sure have changed around here.”

We could hear Mr. Meyers splashing now, behind the closed door. And then we heard Mrs. Meyers.

“Where *did* I put that key?” she puzzled.

“Say, are you still rehearsing that part?” growled Mr. Meyers, between splashes.

“I’ve looked in a dozen places.”

“Well, suppose you go and look in the parlor for a change. Gosh all Friday! You go and lock up the bath-room, and when I try to wash in here you hang around like it was a Punch and Judy show.”

I started off then. For I didn’t think it was **very** nice to listen to Mr. Meyers that way,

when he was taking a bath. But Red stopped me before I got very far.

“There goes the phone,” says he.

“I bet it’s my call,” says Mrs. Meyers, inside.

“Yes,” growled Mr. Meyers, “and this is the last time I ever take a bath in a phone booth—I can tell you that.”

“Hello,” Mrs. Meyers spoke sweetly into the phone.

“I know now how a goldfish feels, when it takes a bath,” Mr. Meyers growled some more.

“Oh, is that you, Mrs. Dunwiddie?” Mrs. Meyers continued.

Mr. Meyers groaned in the tub.

“And now the gab starts. Boy, this is great! All I need is a grand-stand and a ticket office.”

“Yes, I heard you were piecing a quilt for the club,” says Mrs. Meyers. “And you’re what? . . . Oh, you’re raffling it off. . . . Why, of course we will. Just a minute . . . Charley.”

“Yes, I’m still on exhibition,” was the sour reply.

Mrs. Meyers laughed.

“Well, you aren’t much to look at, with that long skinny neck of yours sticking out of that tub,” she said.

“So what?” Mr. Meyers growled, disgusted.

“Mrs. Dunwiddie wants you to buy some quilt tickets, three for a quarter.”

“Tell her I’ll buy the whole blamed quilt, if you’ll just hang up and get out of here.”

Mrs. Meyers went back sweetly to the phone.

“Did you hear that, Mrs. Dunwiddie?”

“Oh, hang up!”

“My husband says I’m bothering him, so I guess I’ll have to hang up. I’ll send the money over by Donald. Good-by.”

“Look at the clock!” floundered Mr. Meyers, like a furious whale.

“Well, if it’ll help any, I’ll turn it back.”

“There won’t be any chicken left when I get there.”

Red went around the house with me, when I left for home, and in the front door.

“See you after supper, Jerry,” says he.

“Pickled pigs feet,” says I, in imitation of Horse Foot.

Then, laughing, I ran home.

CHAPTER XIII

THE MISSING TUB

RED's kitchen was all cleaned up when I got back, with the newspapers gone and everything.

"You'll have to get Scoop or Peg," I told him, "if you want somebody to follow us to-night, like you said."

"Why?" says he, with a quick look at me. "What's the matter with Horse Foot? Couldn't he go?"

I handed him a scrawled dirty note.

"Read that," says I.

And this is what I gave him:

Dear Jerry I am going to eet supher with sum colege stewdents so I can not hoot four you going up to the nrab but I will meat you at the nrab and hoot four you coming home from the nrab.

The Owl

P. S. I spelled barn backwards so your ma and pa will not no where we are going tonite four good detekatives never give away any seekrets.

Red laughed all the way through the crazy note, as I knew he would when I gave it to him. For over home we had almost died over it ourselves.

“Well, of all the brainless nitwits,” says he, when he finished. “And where did you get it, Jerry? It looks like it came out of an ash-can.”

“Dad found it tacked secretly on our front door,” I grinned.

“Secretly?” Red laughed all the harder. “Oh, boy! And what did he say?”

“Oh, he just got a good laugh over it.”

“Well, I should think he would.”

“I wasn’t going to tell him about the old barn,” says I. “For I thought maybe we could keep it a secret and sort of surprise him when we got the bath-house all built. But I almost had to tell him, when he brought in that note at supper-time, and read it.”

Red couldn’t stop laughing over it.

“And did your ma read it too?” he asked.

“Sure thing. We all read it.”

“Oh, boy! I bet your folks think he’s the prize lulu.”

“But how do you suppose he got in with the college students?” I puzzled. “For I never knew that he had any friends up there.”

“Oh, he’s got the crust to walk in on any-



"THIS IS THE LAST TIME I EVER TAKE A BATH IN A PHONE BOOTH," GROWLED MR. MEYERS.

body. He doesn't know any better, I guess."

"But his ma wouldn't let him go up there to supper if he wasn't invited," says I.

"Some class!" laughed Red. "Eating supper with the college students."

"And the way he spelt it," I laughed myself. "S-t-e-w-d-e-n-t-s. I had to guess at some of the other words too."

"The whole thing's a scream."

"Maybe I ought to keep it and frame it," I suggested.

"Yes, and give it to him some day, so he'll see just how dumb he really was."

"Oh, I don't know as he's so terribly dumb," I considered. "For you notice he usually comes out all right."

Red brushed the note away scornfully.

"And you don't call that dumb?" he grunted.

"Mother says he does it on purpose. For he knows we'll laugh at him. And that makes him feel big."

"Well, that's a funny way to feel big," snorted Red. "Excuse me!—I think I'll get mine some other way."

"What I'm wondering," says I, a bit anxiously, "is whether we'll be able to find him up there in the dark."

"He knows where to go."

“I know, but will he be there when we get there? I don’t want to wait around up there all night for him. And if I had known he was going off that way, I would have told him not to monkey with us at all.”

“And shall I call up Scoop, to take his place?”

“If you want to,” says I.

“Or shall we go alone, Jerry?” Red spoke undecided. “What do you say?”

“That’s entirely up to you,” says I. “For either way suits me.”

Mrs. Meyers called then from the front room.

“Donald!”

“Yes, ma?”

“Is that Jerry out there with you?”

“Sure.”

“Well, before he goes, I wish you’d have him help you carry that old bathtub back to the barn.”

Red and I grinned as our eyes met. For bathtub carrying was right in our line then.

“Where is it, ma?” Red called. “On the back porch?”

“Yes. I helped your father carry it out, when he got through with it. But he didn’t have time to carry it any farther.”

“Well, we’ll take care of it all right,” Red promised, with more than usual willingness.

“And did you finally get your pa off to lodge?” I asked, grinning.

“Yes, but he had to come home again, almost as soon as he got there.”

“How was that?” I asked, surprised.

For after what I’d heard in the kitchen I couldn’t conceive that Mr. Meyers would let anything come between him and that chicken-pie supper.

“Oh,” Red laughed peculiarly, “we had a caller. And will *you* be surprised!”

“Who?” I quizzed curiously. For I could see it was somebody important.

“That guy with the pink toenails.”

“Who?” I stared.

“Why, that toenail professor. You know—Professor Goiter, or whatever it is.”

Professor Van Gorder! Boy!—that looked bad, I thought.

“And can’t we use the barn after all?” I spoke anxiously. For I couldn’t think of anything else that would bring him there.

“Oh, that’s all right,” says Red quickly. “He never mentioned the barn.”

“But what was it?” I asked, bubbling to know.

“He wants to rent our picture theatre mornings.”

“Now I know you *are* kidding,” says I.

“No, honest, Jerry. He’s got some kind of a scheme for showing moving pictures to the students—something about factories and gas plants, and stuff like that. He called it Visual Education.”

“Boy!—he’s a smart guy,” says I. “I wish he’d come over to our school. For that would be a swell way to get educated—just sitting looking at pictures.”

“Pa thought it was a joke when ma first phoned him, at the lodge. But he came home in a hurry when he heard that Professor Toenails was still waiting here to talk business. For he didn’t want to lose out on a good thing like that.”

“Professor Toenails!” I laughed. “He’d feel complimented, if he heard that.”

Red’s manner changed then.

“I wish you’d been here, Jerry. For I tell you that guy’s crazy. I said so from the first. And now I know so.”

“Oh, not crazy,” says I. “Just queer—that’s all.”

“No, I mean crazy,” Red came out flatly.

“But, Red,” I argued sensibly, “you ought

to know they wouldn't keep him up there, teaching students, if he wasn't all right. And it's no harm to be queer. Maybe some people think you're queer," I ended, laughing.

"Well, I don't go around talking about pink toenails anyway," he grunted.

"Oh, you and your pink toenails!" I snorted, out of patience with him. "Can't you ever get it right?"

"Well, *green* toenails then," he corrected. "Now, isn't that something bright for a college professor to say? Monkeys have green toenails! What if the President of the United States got up to make a speech on the radio and said, ladies and gentlemen, monkeys have green toenails. Now, honest!—what would you think? Tell me the truth."

"I'd think he was joking."

"Well, that college professor wasn't joking. For I was watching his face yesterday. *He* meant it, Jerry, because he's crazy."

"I don't believe it," I stood my ground. "He's just queer, that's all."

"And now let me tell you the rest," Red spoke mysteriously, like he had saved the best part of his case till the last.

"Well?" I watched his eyes expectantly.

"He never said 'I', 'yes' or 'no' to me, all

the time he was here. I didn't even get a glance."

"Well, he didn't come to see you," says I. "He came to see your pa, on business."

"Yes, but don't you think he might have nodded to me, or something, after us talking to him that way? But he didn't. He didn't know I was on earth. And then, just for fun—and don't lose any of *this*, Jerry."

"Well, hurry up with it," I told him impatiently. For he had me on needles and pins.

"When he was leaving, I went up to him, just for fun, and whispered, monkeys have green toenails."

"Oh, Red!" I cried. "You didn't!"

"Well, now, don't lose your shirt. For I didn't yell it. Nobody heard it but him. And what do you think he did?"

"Probably looked at you kind of disgusted-like, because you didn't have better sense. For that was a secret."

"No, he didn't look disgusted. He just gave me a stony stare, like I was the family half-wit, and walked out."

"You never should have done it, Red."

"Well, I wanted to see what he'd do—for he had been talking so big about Visual Educa-

tion, and a lot more stuff with seventeen cylinders in it."

"Cylinders?"

"Oh, syllables then—don't you ever get anything?"

"And just because he didn't wink at you, or chuckle you under the chin, you think he's crazy."

"I think he's crazy because of what we saw, near the barn, when he was spouting off, and because he's so different at times. He joked with us then. But to-night he was just like an icicle. Br-r-r!"

"Well, he was on business to-night."

"Yes, but just the same he might at least have nodded to me. For what's the sense of being so stiff, even if you are a college professor? But he let on that he never had seen me before. Why, if I didn't have my own eyes and ears, for proof, I'd say it wasn't the same man at all. He made me think of that story I read about the doctor who took the medicine that changed him into another man."

"You mean Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde."

"Yes, that's it. He was one man, when we saw him yesterday afternoon. And to-night, he was an entirely different man."

"But you'll admit that it *was* the same man," I had him cornered.

"Oh, sure!—I know what I see. But he acted entirely different."

"Well, Dad's the same way," says I. "When things are all right at the brickyard he comes home laughing. And when something goes wrong he comes home thoughtful. But that doesn't make him a Dr. Jekyll and a Mr. Hyde. We all change that way."

"Well, just the same," Red wagged, unchanged, "I think the old bird's got bats in his belfry. And I hope he don't start hanging around either, when we start working up there."

"Don't worry," says I. "He won't. For he's got more important things on his mind than bathtubs. But let's get going with it," says I impatiently.

"And shall we take along a hammer to break the lock, like he said?"

"Yes," I nodded. "And we'll take one of your good barn locks. For we'll want to lock up again when we leave."

"Boy!—I bet it's dark and spooky up there," Red shrugged, with an uneasy look at the windows. "And what if we *do* hear someone behind us? What'll we do, Jerry?"

“Well, don’t get scared about it before we start,” says I. “Come on.”

“For two cents I’d call up Scoop.”

“All right,” says I, stopping. “But tell him to hurry. For it’s almost eight o’clock now.”

“Oh, I guess I won’t either,” he reconsidered. “For I can stand it if you can. So come on, Jerry.”

Mrs. Meyers heard us going out, and followed us to the door.

“Don’t forget about that tub,” she reminded.

“I won’t,” promised Red, as he closed the door behind us.

I turned my flashlight around.

“But where is it?” says I.

For there wasn’t any tub on the porch.

Red stuck his head in the door.

“Say, ma,” he called excitedly. “Where did you say it was?”

Mrs. Meyers came quickly.

“Why, we left it standing there,” she pointed. “But maybe your father took it down the steps himself, when he went out.”

But the bathtub wasn’t below, or in the barn, or any place else that we could find.

Red got his pa on the phone. But he couldn’t help us. The tub was on the back porch, he said, the last he saw of it.

There was just one more chance.

“Listen, ma,” says Red, going to her beggingly. “You aren’t fooling us, are you? You didn’t hide the tub on us, or get someone to take it away, did you? Tell me, ma. And tell me the truth, please!”

“You poor child!” says she, putting a sympathetic arm around him. And then she slowly shook her head, as though the whole affair was as much of a mystery to her as it was to us. “No, Donald,” says she. “I’m not guilty this time. I haven’t the slightest idea where your tub went to.”

Red and I felt pretty sick. And we wished now that we had kept the tub hidden till we were ready to move it. For we saw plainly enough that someone, who had been watching for just this chance, had stolen it. For this was no joke.

It was either the Strickers or the pantherman. And to satisfy ourselves first about the Strickers we lit out for Zulutown. But there was no sign of the tub there. And when we looked in on the Strickers, through a window, they were all sitting around a table playing Lotto, with Bid calling the numbers.

No, it wasn’t them. It was the pantherman. Having failed once to get the tub away

from us, he had come again, at just the right moment. But who he was, or why he had taken the tub, or where he'd gone with it, we hadn't the slightest idea.

Nor did a careful search of Red's yard produce any clues. There wasn't even a hat this time. There wasn't a single thing to help us.

So you can imagine how downhearted we were, and how mad we were at that old pantherman, when we separated at nine o'clock for our homes.

CHAPTER XIV

THE RESCUE PARTY

DAD woke me up in the middle of the night.

“Did Sammy Rail come home with you?” he asked, when he finally got my eyes open.

“Who?” says I, too sleepy at first to know what he was talking about, or to notice his manner.

“Horse Foot. He said something in his note about meeting you somewhere. Did you bring him home with you?”

“No,” I shook my head, understanding now. “We never went up there.”

“Well, if you aren’t a dandy!” growled Dad, straightening.

And there he stood looking down at me like a severe old owl in pink pajamas.

Mother flew in then in a kimona.

“Did you find out anything?” she asked Dad anxiously.

“Yes,” he grunted. “Jerry never went up there at all. Can you beat that?”

“But I thought—” Mother began, with a scattered look between us.

“Yes,” Dad cut in grimly, “you thought he was going up there with the bathtub. But he didn’t, for some reason or other. And now I suppose the little kid’s up there all alone.”

“At this time of night!” cried mother, terrified. “Oh, dear! Isn’t that terrible! And he’s so small too. Oh, Jerry, Jerry!” she wrung her hands. “How could you be so thoughtless?”

“Yes,” Dad went at me, like he was all out of patience with me, “you certainly didn’t make much use of your head. For he told you he’d wait for you up there. And as long as you include him in your plans you should look out for him.”

“But I never told him to go up there,” I cried, feeling that I was entitled to some small defense. “That was his own crazy idea. So why should I have to chase clear up there after him?”

To tell you the truth I had forgotten all about him, with the tub going that way, and so many other things to think about of more importance to me. But even if I had thought of him, I don’t think I would have bothered to start after him. For he knew the way home.

And this wasn't the first night that he'd been out alone. So why get so hot and bothered about it?

But Mother and Dad couldn't see it my way at all. Even if I *had* lost the bathtub, they said—and they both acted as though they wanted to jump up and shout about that!—that was no excuse for me letting Horse Foot go up there all alone and wait half the night for me. For I was the older of the two. And as long as I knew he was there I should have gone after him, and brought him home safely.

I got up and dressed then. For Mr. Rail was getting out of his car, after talking with Mother and Dad on the phone. And someone had to go along to show him where the barn was located.

"But why don't you go too?" I asked Dad, as I started down the stairs to get my cap and sweater.

For I didn't want to go off alone with Mr. Rail and probably get jawed all the way up there and all the way back, and made to feel like a two-cent piece.

"I'd go in a jiffy, if I could," says Dad, as he limped behind me. "But I hurt my foot this afternoon. And I can't get my shoe on."

So I went out alone, shivering at first as the

chill night air struck me in the face. And then, when Mr. Rail came along in his car, I jumped in.

“I’m sorry,” I told him, as we started at full speed for College Hill. “But I forgot all about Sammy to-night. For someone stole our bathtub. And that’s all I could think of.”

“Sure,” Mr. Rail nodded kindly. “I know how you felt. And I’m sorry I had to spoil your sleep. But I couldn’t do anything alone. And maybe I can make it up to you some time, if you’ll let me.”

Gosh! That didn’t sound very much like a jawing.

“Oh, I’m glad to help you,” I spoke quickly. And I *was* too. Only at home it made me sore to have Mother and Dad blame everything on me that way. And I guess I was kind of grouchy too, when they first woke me up, over the loss of my tub. But I was all right now.

“Do you know what I’ve been thinking about, Jerry?” Mr. Rail spoke earnestly, as we speeded along in the dark, first turning to the left at the corner of Main and Hill streets, and then angling up College Hill.

“What?” says I.

“I’ve been thinking that I’ll either have to saw you down to Sammy’s size, or stretch him

up to fit you. Or, if that don't work, I guess I'll have to separate you two, for the good of the neighborhood."

I saw what he meant. He thought that I was too big for Horse Foot, and that it was through trying to copy after me that the little kid got into so many scrapes.

"I've always tried to look out for him," I spoke feelingly. "But I just forgot to-night."

"Oh, you've been fine," says he quickly. "And I just wish that Sammy was a little bit bigger. For I can't imagine any boy, Jerry, I'd rather have him chum with than you. He's all wrapped up in you. You're the king of the walk to him. And I don't know what'll happen if I try to separate you. But what do you think about it? Do you think I should?"

"I suppose so," I spoke slowly, "if you think so. But I'll miss him."

"Well, I've got to do something to tone him down. For this is twice in one week that I've had to chase him nights. I can't put up with that. And his mother blames it all on you. But here we are at the top of the hill. Where do we go from here?"

"The barn's over there," I pointed, into the darkness.

“All right, then we’ll cross the campus,” says he, going on.

“I don’t think you can get clear up to it with a car,” says I. “For I don’t remember a road. But it won’t be far, after we get out.”

“And do you know these students that Sammy had supper with, Jerry?”

“No,” says I.

“It’s that bunch in the freshman dormitory, I think. At least that’s where I phoned, when he didn’t get home on time.”

“And was he there then?” I asked.

“No. He was on his way home, they said. So we looked for him every minute. But he didn’t show up. And finally I started out to find him.”

“I wish you’d called me sooner,” says I.

“Yes, I wish I had myself. It would have saved his mother some anxious moments. But we’ll soon get him now.”

The college buildings were all in darkness, except one, on College Avenue, where a party was going on. The street was full of parked cars. And as we turned here, to go still farther to the left, I caught sight of Professor Van Gorder in one of the windows. He was all dressed up in a long-tailed coat, with a

funny stand-up collar and white gloves. But I knew him right off. For his big nose and bushy red hair were unmistakable.

“Professor Toenails,” I laughed.

“Who?” says Mr. Rail, curious.

“Oh, I was just talking to myself,” says I.

“That’s where Professor Van Gorder lives,” I was told.

“Yes, I just saw him through the window.”

Our road came to an end here, with a barbed-wire fence in front of us. So we got out, with our flashlights, and took to our legs across a weedy field.

Presently I heard a familiar hoot ahead of us.

“That’s him now,” says I excitedly.

“And do you suppose he’s been hooting ever since he got here?” grunted Mr. Rail, with a disgusted air.

He thought that was kind of dumb, I guess.

“Well, that’s him, all right,” says I, hurrying on.

“I sometimes wonder if that kid’s all there. But he gets his marks in school, and everything else he sets his mind on. So I guess there’s nothing to worry about.”

“He isn’t half as dumb as he lets on,” says I. And I had found that to be true too.

“But where is he?” says Mr. Rail, when we got to the spot where the hoot had come from.

“He’s over that way now,” says I, as we got a hoot from another direction.

“Hey, Sammy!” Mr. Rail called. “Where are you?”

“I can see the barn,” says I, turning my light on it.

And it looked terribly grim and gaunt in the crowding darkness. Gee! There was something about it that sent the shivers clear through me. And I was mighty glad, let me tell you, that I hadn’t been left up there alone, like Horse Foot. But anything’s all right with him, I guess.

“Sammy!” Mr. Rail called again. “Where are you? Why don’t you answer me?”

There was a hoot inside now. And when we turned our flashlights in, through the back door, there sat Horse Foot eating a cupcake.

“I s-s-saved it for you,” he told me, as the last crumb went down. “But you g-g-got here too late.”

“But how did you get the door open?” says I. For I remembered it had a big lock on when I saw it last.

“Oh,” says he, “I f-f-found an iron bar, and p-p-pried it.”

“And do you know what time it is?” Mr. Rail asked severely.

“S-s-sure. Midnight.”

“Then why didn’t you come home?”

“I w-w-waited for Jerry. And I h-h-had a cupcake for him. H-h-hambone gave it to me. But I a-a-ate it finally.”

“And who’s Hambone?” I asked. “One of the students?”

“S-s-sure—the one I asked to stay to s-s-supper with.”

“What?” Mr. Rail spoke sharply. “You didn’t ask *him*?”

“S-s-sure.”

“But I thought he asked you?”

“S-s-sure. When I asked him.”

“Well, of all things!” grunted Mr. Rail. “But come on—let’s go home. For your ma’s down there worrying her head off.”

“W-w-why?” Horse Foot asked innocently.

“Yes,” Mr. Rail snorted. “Now I wonder why! And aren’t you glad, Jerry, that you’re through with him?”

“Oh, he’s all right,” says I loyally.

“But where’s the b-b-bathtub?” Horse Foot asked suddenly.

“I was going to tell you,” says I. “Someone stole it on us to-night at Red’s house. And

that's why we didn't come up here, till your father got me."

"Oh! . . ." says Horse Foot, as though he had just got the answer to something that had been puzzling him. Then he started off briskly. "C-c-come on," says he. "I'm going home and g-g-get my keys."

"You're going home and go to bed," his father growled.

"S-s-sure," nodded Horse Foot. "And tomorrow I'll g-g-get my keys."

"What keys?" I asked curiously, as we waited while Mr. Rail closed the barn door. "What are you talking about?"

But he wouldn't answer me. He just laughed queerly, as though he knew some good joke, or something like that. And then he asked me if he could borrow my roller skates.

"But what's the matter with your own skates?" says I.

"I'll n-n-need four," says he.

"And what are you going to do?" says I. "Skate around like a monkey, with skates on your hands too?"

"M-m-maybe," says he, with another queer laugh. "And m-m-maybe I'll wear a wig."

But I didn't see any sense to that.

Mr. Rail was having trouble with the door.

And finally I told him to let it go and I'd come up some other time and fix it.

We all rode home in the front seat. And on the campus, Horse Foot pointed out the dormitory where he had had supper.

"H-h-hambone's a swell guy," says he. "And I'm g-g-going to be a maggot."

"A *maggot*?" says I, staring at him.

"S-s-sure," he spoke proudly. "A maggot."

"Yes, you're a maggot, all right," his father grunted.

"No!" Horse Foot corrected himself quickly. "I'm a mascot."

"That's better," says I, grinning.

"I'm going to b-b-be Hambone's mascot. For he told me."

"You're going to leave Hambone alone after this," Mr. Rail started then to lay the law down to him. "And after this you're going to stay home nights, and do your school work and behave yourself. And I want you to quit chasing over to Jerry's house so much."

"W-w-why?"

"He's tired of you. You're too much of a pest. So give him a rest."

"But I can t-t-take your skates, can't I?" Horse Foot asked me, unconcerned.

"Sure thing," I laughed.

“And m-m-maybe I’ll need some keys too,” he added thoughtfully.

More key talk!

“But what do you want keys for?” I quizzed curiously. For I could see that he had something on his mind.

And if he had told me then I dare say I would have tumbled out of the car in amazement. But he just laughed in that queer way that he had picked up.

And then, as though everything that had happened that night was just a regular part of his common every-day life, he leaned over against me and fell sound asleep.

CHAPTER XV

HORSE FOOT AND THE KEYS

“BUT you haven’t told me yet,” Dad spoke to me across the breakfast table the following morning, “how you found Sammy last night. Was he asleep when you got there?”

“No,” says I, “he was still hooting around.”

“You don’t say so!” laughed Dad, who saw the funny side of it. “And what did his father say to that?”

“Oh, he was kind of disgusted, I guess. For it did sound awful crazy.”

“And do you suppose the silly child would have kept it up all night,” says Mother, from her place at the table, “if you hadn’t gone up there after him?”

“Well, he was still going strong when we got there,” I grinned.

“He sure is a corker,” laughed Dad. “And he tries awful hard to make us think that he’s empty from the neck up. But he never fooled me. It’s just his silly way of getting you older boys to notice him, I guess.”

“Yes, that’s what I told Red,” I nodded.

Mother looked at the clock.

“You better hurry,” she told me. “For it’s almost time for the first bell.”

“I’ll make it all right,” says I, as I touched up my cornflakes with some more cream.

“And how do you feel this morning?” Dad quizzed. “Kind of sleepy?”

“No, I feel swell,” I told him, “except for that old tub.”

“Well,” Dad chuckled confidently, “I think Mr. Meyers can tell you more about that than anybody else around here.”

“Why, of course,” Mother quickly sided in, with the same confidence. “For who else would be silly enough to want that dirty old tub, except you boys? He took it to get rid of it, just as his wife has wanted him to do from the first. But for myself, I’m thankful it’s gone. Now, maybe we’ll have a little peace around here. For all that trouble last night, Jerry, came directly from that old tub, and your silly plans for it.”

“Yes,” grimaced Dad, “and I haven’t forgotten about last Saturday night either, and how I had to sit up till four o’clock in the morning scrubbing that stinking old cat water off me, that came from your tub.”

“Well, I don’t know who took it,” I growled, just as confident as them. “But one thing—I know it wasn’t Mr. Meyers. And it wasn’t Mrs. Meyers either.”

“Then it must have been the Strickers,” says Mother.

“No,” I spoke, still confident, “it wasn’t the Strickers. For we proved that. It was some strange man that took it. And Red and I are going to keep on looking till we find out what he did with it too.”

“But, Jerry!—listen!” Mother spoke patiently. “Why should any strange man bother his head over an old bathtub like that?”

“That’s what we’re going to find out,” says I, with a businesslike air.

Dad eyed me curiously.

“But where did you get the idea,” says he, “that it was some strange man?”

“Because we know how big he is—he’s about four inches taller than you, and he wears a seven-and-three-quarters felt hat, that he bought in Chicago, and he walks on his toes, like a panther.”

“Well, well, well,” laughed Dad. “We have Sherlock Holmes with us this morning.”

“Yes,” Mother shot another glance at the clock, “but Sherlock Holmes is going to be late

for his A, B, C's if he doesn't hurry up."

"All right," I got up then. "I'm off."

"And are you going to stop for Sammy?" asked Mother.

"I don't know," says I sobering. "For last night his pa told me he might not want us running around together any more. So I don't know whether to stop or not."

"Well, I wouldn't," Mother advised quickly, "if that's the case. For his mother's just been looking for a chance to separate you two. She blames you for every wrong move he makes, because you're older. So she may take this chance of slamming the door in your face, to get rid of you."

"Well, if she does," I grinned, "I bet you a cookie that Horse Foot crawls through a window to get to me."

"Yes, I think myself," says Mother, "that they'll have their hands full if they try to separate you two. For while Sammy may have his queer stupid ways, there's certainly nothing the matter with his will power. And I've never seen the time yet that his mother could make him mind. She talks her head off, and all the time she's talking he does just about as he pleases. But, listen, Jerry!" Mother here spoke earnestly. "If she *does* tell you to keep

away from there, I want you to do exactly as she says, without any argument about who's right or wrong, or any back talk, or anything. Is that clear to you?"

"Sure thing," I nodded. "I won't sass her. For I never did anyway."

"Of course not," Dad put in. "We know you wouldn't do that."

"We'll all do our part to please her," Mother continued, "even to putting Sammy out of here whenever he comes over, though, to tell you the truth, I've always enjoyed having him here before. For I like him. And until you showed up with him last night, Jerry, I was worried sick. For I thought how awful it would be if anything happened to him through us. So it was a big relief to me when you drove in with the little fellow."

There was a familiar sound on the back porch.

"Oh, oh!" says Dad, grinning. "That sounds like Mrs. Rail now."

Mother got up quickly.

"I'll close the door," says she, "and keep her in the kitchen. And you two can go out the front way."

Mrs. Rail started talking the minute she landed in the kitchen. I could hear her as I

hurriedly picked up my schoolbooks. And when I got home that noon Mother was still laughing about it.

“I never heard so much scattered talk in all my life,” says she. “First it was gravy bowls—for Sammy and Jane got to quarreling over a gravy bowl this morning and pulled it in halves!—then it was bathtubs, and then it was polliwogs and old barns and everything else.”

“But where did the polliwogs come in?” says I curiously. For I didn’t know anything about any polliwogs.

“Oh, she got to comparing her troubles. And she couldn’t think of anything quite as bad as last night, except the time Sammy fell into the mud-hole, in his Sunday suit, and had to have the polliwogs pumped out of him.”

“But he never did,” says I. “That’s just her crazy talk. For how could anybody swallow polliwogs?”

“Well, she says he did. They used a stomach pump on him, she said, and something came up with a tail on it. But the funniest of all was the sliver. I thought I’d bust. But, of course, I didn’t dare even crack a smile in front of *her*. For it was terribly serious to her.”

“And what about the sliver?” asked Dad,

who had come in to dinner, and stood listening.

“Well, it seems that Sammy slid down something in that old barn last night and got a sliver in him. And this morning both parents worked on him with a reading glass and a pair of pinchers. They saw something that looked like a sliver under the skin. But it was a little mole instead. And I guess, when they put the pinchers on it, and pulled, poor Sammy almost kicked the house down.”

Dad raised his ears.

“Well, you better pipe down,” he cautioned quickly. “For here she comes again.”

“Oh, dear!” complained Mother, frowning. “And I was all ready to sit down and eat.”

But Mrs. Rail didn’t stop long this time. She just wanted to borrow a cup of flour, she wheezed, for some gravy.

Then in walked Horse Foot himself, just as big as cuffy.

His ma’s eyes almost popped out of her head.

“Sammy!” she went at him sharply. “I thought I told you not to come over here any more.”

“S-s-sure,” says Horse Foot, unconcerned, as he went from door to door, looking at the

keys. Then he sauntered into the dining room, with his mother after him.

“Sammy!” she cried again, with increasing sharpness. “Did you hear me? I want you to go home. And I don’t want you coming over here again. For you and Jerry aren’t going to play together any more. *Sammy!* Do you hear me talking to you?”

Mother had to fight to keep a straight face.

“I can put him out with a broom,” says she, her eyes dancing, “if you want me to.”

Mrs. Rail finally gave up.

“Oh, dear!” she wailed, sinking helplessly into a chair. “I don’t know what’s going to happen to me with that boy. For he simply drives me to distraction at times.”

“Did you ever try paddling him?” Dad slipped in the pointed suggestion.

“We’ve never laid a finger on him. Nor his sister either. For we don’t believe in that. We believe that children were given to us to love, and not to bang around. But as I told my husband this morning, when he was gargling, you’ve simply *got* to do something with that child, I said, to restrain him. For I’m at my wit’s end, I said. And then’s when we heard that rumpus downstairs. And when I

ran down, there stood Sammy with one half of the gravy bowl, and Jane with the other, and both of them glaring at each other like a couple of tantalized chimpanzees. Oh, dear! It's certainly the mothers who have to bear the crosses in this world, and get the gray hairs. But I've got to go now," she arose hurriedly. "For I left the beefsteak on cooking. And like as not I'll find Jane feeding it to the cat when I get home."

"But aren't you going to take Sammy?" Mother smiled.

"Oh, yes!—I almost forgot." Then she raised her voice. "Sammy!" she called. "Sammy! Where are you, dear?"

"I think he's upstairs," says I.

For I could hear door keys clicking up there.

"But what's he monkeying with all our door keys for?" muttered Dad.

"Oh, he's got keys on the brain," says I. "He started talking about them last night, when I told him the tub was gone. And everybody he met to-day, on the way to school and back, he asked them if they had any old keys."

"That's funny," says Dad. "I'd like to know what his idea is."

"You and me both," says I. "But he won't tell me."

“S-s-say, Mrs. Todd,” Horse Foot then called down the stairs. “Have y-y-you got any old door keys in a b-b-box?”

“No,” says Mother sharply. “But I’ve got a switch down here for unmannerly boys. And your mother and I are coming up there to use it on you too, if you don’t come down here, as she says, and mind her. For she wants you to go home with her.”

“S-s-sure,” says Horse Foot, coming down the stairs just as nice as you please. “And have you g-g-got any old keys on a h-h-hook?” he stopped to ask Mother persistently.

“No,” says she, ready now to shake him out of his pants, “I haven’t any old keys on a hook either. And if you have any of our door keys, I want you to give them back.”

“S-s-sure,” says Horse Foot, starting off. “To-morrow.”

“No,” Mother says firmly, “*now.*”

And she took him by the collar to show him that she meant business.

“Yes, Sammy,” chirped his mother, “if you have any keys, give them back, like a good little man.”

So he shelled out. And then, without a word of explanation, he went off with his mother to eat dinner.

“I think you’d better find out about that key business, Jerry,” Dad advised thoughtfully. “For I’d like to know what he’s up to. It may mean more trouble for someone.”

The janitor that night couldn’t lock the schoolhouse, for the keys were all gone. Our teacher even lost the key to her desk. In the same way the neighbors, all up and down the street, began complaining that their keys simply walked off on them without rhyme or reason. They were bewildered.

Wherever Horse Foot went there was confusion over lost keys. And then, as though he had tried the keys somewhere, and found they weren’t what he wanted, they all came back again, where they belonged. But do you think I could find out anything from that busy little squawk? No, sir, he wouldn’t tell me a word of his plans. He just laughed. And all the time I was getting close to something, that wasn’t good for me, and I never suspected it.

But I’ll hurry along now and tell you all about it.

CHAPTER XVI

MORE MYSTERY

THREE days passed, with Horse Foot still taking and returning door keys, with no explanation of what he did with them when he had them, and with Red and I still searching unsuccessfully for our stolen tub.

I saw less of Horse Foot now than usual. Not because his folks were keeping him away from me, but because he was too busy with his keys to run around with me. When he got a new bunch of keys he disappeared like a rat into a hole. But where he went to, or what he did, and why he was forever trying out door keys was a complete riddle to me. I quizzed him, and I tried to follow him, particularly after school. For then is when he went off to try the keys that he had collected that day. But for all the luck I had I might just as well have shut myself in a dark closet. For he slipped away from me like soft butter through a fork.

And *I* was the one who had laughed at him at first for being dumb! Ouch!

Boy!—there was nothing dumb about him. But he could act it just as good as ever. And those who didn't know him as well as I did still thought he *was* dumb.

Well, as I say, I put in three unsuccessful days—from Monday to Thursday—trying to solve the double mystery of the missing tub and Horse Foot's new interest in door keys. And then something very important happened.

I got a call Thursday noon from Professor Toenails!

I thought at first it was Red, fooling me. For when I went to the phone a voice said, "Monkeys have green toenails." So I says right back, "Yes, and I know a monkey at the other end of this line who's got freckles too, and dirty feet." Then the voice said, "I beg pardon!" And right off I saw it wasn't Red at all. So I started talking right.

"Is that you, Professor Van Gorder?" I asked excitedly. For somehow I knew he wouldn't be calling me up without an important reason. I was on needles and pins to know what it was. And I was suddenly reminded too, by his unexpected call, that I hadn't fixed up his barn door yet, where Horse Foot had pried his way in. I intended to mention it to

him on the phone. But I didn't get to it, as you'll learn.

"I gave you the secret signal," says he, deeply mysterious. "So you should know without asking who I am."

"Yes," says I breathlessly.

For just imagine a kid like me getting secret signals from a big college professor like him! Gee! I was so excited I could hardly stand still.

"I'd like to see you to-night after school," says he. "It is very important."

"At your home?" says I.

"No, I'll meet you at the barn. And remember always," he concluded mysteriously, "monkeys have green toenails."

With that he abruptly hung up, leaving me standing there with my under jaw halfway to my knees. Then, when I got a grip on myself, I lit out for Red's house.

"Guess what!" says I, tumbling in on him.

"Your ma swallowed her false teeth?" he grinned.

"No," I panted. "I just had a call from that toenail professor."

"So what?" says Red, interested.

"He wants me to come up to the barn after

school. He says he wants to see me—it's important."

"And me too?" asked Red.

"No, he didn't mention you," says I. "But I want you to go with me, just the same. For I don't want to go up alone."

"Oh! . . ." says Red, with a triumphant air. "So someone else is getting kind of leary of him, huh? I thought you'd come to it in time."

"But I still don't think he's crazy," says I. "That isn't it. But that old barn kind of scared me the other night, when I went up there for Horse Foot. It made me think it was getting ready to crouch and spring on me in the dark. And that's why I want you to go up, Red—for company. You will, won't you?"

"Sure," he promised. "But why does he want you to meet him there? Did he say?"

"No. And I asked him if I should go to his house—but he said no, he'd meet me at the barn. And I was going to tell him about that broken lock too, that Horse Foot jimmied up. But he hung up before I got a chance. And did I tell you what he said at the start, Red, and how he ended up?"

"How?" Red asked eagerly.

"He said, monkeys have green toenails."

“Suffering cats!” squawked Red, acting like a lot of dangerous stuff was buzzing around his head and he was trying to bat it off. “Let’s not go up, Jerry. For he may be planning to make monkeys out of us, and skin us alive, or something, and nail our hides on that old barn of his.”

“I don’t like the barn,” says I. “It gives me the cold creeps, for some reason or other. But I still think he’s all right. Queer, Red. Just queer, that’s all. And if you’ll go, I’ll meet you here right after school. Is that o-k?”

“Check,” says he, like the faithful pal that he was.

I got some tools to take with me, and a good padlock, to take the place of the one that Horse Foot had ruined. And after school that night, as planned, Red and I set out, going as before up Happy Hollow, then to the right up the hill, and down along the weedy line fence.

“There he is,” says Red, stopping. And if he actually had seen a ghost he couldn’t have stopped any quicker or acted any scareder. Which kind of scared me too. Still, I told myself, that was silly, in broad daylight. So I went on till I was close enough to the professor to speak to him.

“Oh, yes!” says he pleasantly. And coming

up, beaming, his eyes lit up with pleasure, he gave me his hand.

I took it. And behind me I heard something go down Red's throat. He thought, I guess, that I took an awful chance, letting the man get hold of me that way.

But everything was all right.

"Well," he asked pleasantly, "how are you coming with your bath-house?"

"We aren't coming," says I.

"What seems to be the matter?" says he, watching me closely.

"We lost our tub," says I.

"Lost it?" says he, losing some of his pleasantness and showing disappointment instead. "Is that why you haven't brought it up here to the barn yet?"

"Yes," I nodded. "Someone stole it on us last Monday night."

He stared, saying something under his breath. And then he laughed. But it wasn't a happy pleased laugh. It was an irritated, disappointed laugh.

"Well, that's that," says he. "A man can't be lucky always."

I saw that he was ready to go.

"But what did you want of me?" says I,

puzzled. For I couldn't imagine that he had called me up there just to talk about the missing bathtub. For I couldn't see what there was about that to interest him. And yet that's all we had talked about so far.

Then I remembered about the broken lock.

"If it's the back door," says I, "we're going to fix that now."

But I don't think he heard me at all. For he went off mumbling to himself. And a moment or two later he disappeared in the direction of the college.

"Queer," mocked Red. "Just queer, that's all. Humph!"

"Well, maybe you're right," says I, muddled up. "But what did he want anyway?"

"Do you know what *I* think?" says Red, tensely.

"What?"

"I think he's been over there looking for that tub. But he couldn't find it. And I think he called you up here to find out *why* you hadn't brought it."

"But why should he be interested in our tub?" says I.

"Well, you know what *I* think about him," says Red, with conviction. "And crazy people

get some funny ideas sometimes. Maybe he thought he could start up a bath-house himself, and sell baths to the college students."

"Oh, don't be silly, Red. It wasn't that. It was something else. But what was it?"

"Well, let's get the door fixed," says he, "and we'll talk about that on the way home. For I'm getting the same feeling about that old barn as you. And it's getting pretty shadowy up here, with the sun going down. So let's get the door fixed and get out of here."

We went up guardedly and looked all around, before we started to work. But there wasn't anything harmful that we could see. There wasn't a sound in the barn, or the slightest movement of anything. So I got the tools out and we got busy. It didn't take us long. And with the new padlock snapped in place, we got out of there just as fast as we could.

"I should have given him the new key when he was here," I told Red.

"And are you going to take it over to him?" Red asked.

"Well, don't you think we should?" says I.

"O-k," says he, walking on.

Pretty soon we came to the big house on the corner where I had seen the party going on.

“He lives there,” I said. “For Mr. Rail told me.”

“But, Jerry!—just a minute.”

“What did you stop for?” I asked.

“Well, you know what he told you—about the monkeys.”

“And do you think I ought to say that, if anybody else comes to the door?”

“Well, what do you think?” Red spoke uncertainly.

“Maybe I better,” says I, “to be on the safe side. Otherwise I’d have to do a lot of explaining.”

“Yes, you couldn’t just hand somebody a key and say, here’s a key that belongs to you now. You’d have to say *what* key. And he told us not to mention the old barn to anybody but him.”

“All right,” says I.

So we went up to a side door and rapped. And when an elderly educated-looking lady came to the door, I said, “Monkeys have green toenails.”

But if I had told her that she had green toenails herself, she couldn’t have acted more affronted.

And finally, I guess, she concluded she hadn’t

heard right. For she bent over, with a puzzled air, to get a better look at our faces, and asked, "What did you say? Will you please repeat that again?"

"Monkeys have green toenails," says I.

She saw then that she had heard right the first time. And, boy!—she was as stiff as a poker now.

"What is your purpose," she asked icily, her bright eyes flashing, "in coming here with such a ridiculous assertion as that? Is it the work of the students? And did they send you here to annoy us?"

"No," says I. And then I got to thinking maybe Mr. Rail got the wrong house. So I says, "This is where Professor Van Gorder lives, isn't it?"

"Yes," she spoke in the same icy dignified way, "this is Professor Peer Van Gorder's home. And it so happens that I am the professor's wife. So I am in a position to assure you, whatever your silly purpose is, that we are *not* interested in monkeys with green toenails."

I turned to Red.

"It was green, wasn't it?" I asked, confused.

"Sure," he nodded.

"I think you boys better leave now," says

the woman, as she got ready to close the door.

“But we want to see your husband,” I told her quickly. “And he told us to say that.”

“Told you to say what?” she asked evenly, trying to read our faces.

“That monkeys have green toenails.”

“Preposterous!” she spoke indignantly.

And *bang!* went the door in our face.

“Queer,” mocked Red. “Just queer, that’s all you can make of it.”

Dog-gone *him!* But I’d show him yet!

And taking a determined hitch in my belt, I went around to the back door, where an Irish servant woman met us this time.

“An’ what might ye two b’ys be wantin’?” she inquired.

“Monkeys have green toenails,” says I.

She gave me a steady look, surprised at first, then puzzled. Then, telling us to wait, and closing the door behind her, she went off inside.

It was my turn to act big now.

“Didn’t I tell you?” I triumphed around Red proudly.

For I thought sure that the servant had gone to get the professor. But instead she came back with his still more indignant wife.

“What do you boys want anyway?” she

went at us sharply, with mixed anger and indignation.

"Sure, ma'am," the servant spoke ahead of us, "I tol' ye what they said. I sez to them, what might ye be wantin'. An' they sez, monkeys have green toenails. An' methinks I, they must be a couple of village half-wits. So I got you, ma'am."

I began to back off.

"I guess we made a mistake," says I.

But just then the professor himself came up behind us, heading us off.

"Oh, yes!" says he, as his eyes fell on Red. "You're the little Meyers boy. And have you a message from your father?"

"No," says Red, "but we got a key for you."

"The theatre key?"

"No, your barn key. We put a new padlock on the back door like you told us we could. And we brought you the key."

Red had told me how different the man acted when he was talking business. And I saw it now, and was amazed by it. For he didn't seem like the same man at all.

"Just a minute," says he, with a blank look. "I don't know what you're talking about."

Another Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde, all right! I saw that. And I clutched Red's arm.

“Let’s get out of here,” says I, scared silly now. For I didn’t want to monkey around with any man like that, whether he really couldn’t remember, or was acting or what. I guess not!

But with the two women telling him what we had said, and his own suspicions now aroused, he wouldn’t let us go. He made us stay there till we had told him everything. And then he told *us*, in that high-falutin’ way of his, that we were a couple of annoying nitwits, or the butt of some brainless student prank, and marched into the house as high and lordly as you please.

Br-r-r! When Red and I finally got away from there, we felt like we had been leaning up against the north pole.

And slowly the feeling came to us too that maybe there *was* a joke some place. Monkeys with green toenails! It looked like *we* were the monkeys.

CHAPTER XVII

A DARING PLAN

MOTHER told me when I got home that there was a letter for me on the dining-room table. And I thought from the way she spoke that it was a letter with my name on it, that had just come in the mail. But instead it was a letter that Grandma Carey had left for me to read, with her name on it.

I was still kind of groggy from my bewildering experience on the hill. So I didn't show any particular interest in the letter till I saw the name of a bathtub company printed at the top. And then, boy!—I got into it in a hurry.

Here it is:

Dear Aunty:

I suppose it will surprise you to learn that I am down here in Cincinnati. For I was still home the last time I wrote to you, and had just about given up hopes of ever getting a job. But I got a break finally. And here I am, in one of the snappiest little advertising departments in the country, with the very important title of Assistant Advertising Manager coupled

to my name. I'm going to see you at Xmas, when I come home. And if you take a notion in the meantime to put in a new bathtub, make it a Continental (the better bathtub with the beautiful bulge!), and I'll get it for you wholesale. But here's what I had in mind in writing to you. One time when I was there you told me about an old bathtub in the neighborhood that Buffalo Bill took a bath in. I never forgot that. And I'm wondering now if it isn't an early Continental. For the company's records show that their very first bathtub was shipped into your section. We have an exhibit room here where we keep our old models along with the new, for contrast, and it would mean a lot to us to be able to show our dealers the very first bathtub that we manufactured. So, Aunt Sara, I'd like to have you find out about that old tub, if you can conveniently, and let me know if it is a Continental, as I hope. The name and number will be painted on the bottom, if you can get to the bottom. But you can tell the owners we'll gladly install a new bathtub for them, to get the old one, or we'll even pay them for the tub, if they prefer, going as high as one hundred dollars. And when you write, be sure and put Asst. Adv. Mgr. on the letter just to make me feel that I'm a big shot whether you really think I am or not. And don't write it Johnny! For John or Jno. is much more businesslike. But to you I'm still the same old rattle-headed nephew,

Johnny Green

“Did you read it?” I asked Mother, when I finished.

“No,” says she, as she bustled around getting supper. “I was too busy. Why?—is it anything important?”

“Well, go ahead and read it,” says I, offering it to her. “For I think it’ll make you feel good, after the way you and Mrs. Meyers ran down that old tub of ours.”

She ran through the letter hurriedly.

“Goodness me!” says she, big-eyed, when she finished. “Whoever’d think of anybody paying a hundred dollars for that old thing? And you let it get away from you too. Well, you’re a dandy!”

“Yes,” I spoke resentfully, “and you’re the one who cheered the loudest when it *did* get away from me! Now you can see who was right! For if you and Mrs. Meyers had let us keep it in the cellar, or some other safe place, we’d have it now, and the hundred dollars too.”

“But don’t you think you can find it,” says Mother eagerly, “if you look for it? For surely it can’t be far off.”

“Red and I *have* looked every place we can think of,” says I.

“And you’re sure the Strickers didn’t take the tub?”

“Of course, I’m sure. It was some strange man. And the chances are he’s a hundred miles from here by now.”

“Well, you haven’t proof of that,” persisted Mother. “So I’d keep on looking if I were you. For a hundred dollars is a lot of money, Jerry. And I’d hate to see you lose it.”

“I’ve lost it already,” I wailed.

“Oh, nonsense!” cried Mother, losing patience with me. “Don’t be so helpless, but get out and look around, like I say. You think you’re such a good detective. Now go ahead and prove it.”

So, to please her, I went over to Red’s house, to tell him about the letter and some other stuff that was running through my head now. But he had gone off somewhere with his parents. For everything was dark over there. So I turned around and came home again.

But I didn’t go inside. I sat down on the back porch, all by myself. And there I sat till supper-time thinking about the tub and that other tangle. And the more I thought about it the more amazed I got. For everything went together like a jigsaw puzzle. Boy!

—I was jumping with excitement now. But I didn't get a chance to tell Red about it till the next morning, for he was gone till bedtime.

“And what did you figure out overnight, Jerry?” he asked me, when I stopped in to walk to school with him.

“Plenty,” says I.

“I've been doing some thinking myself,” says he thoughtfully. “And I've come to the conclusion that there's two men up there just alike. One is the real professor, and the other is a copy-cat.”

“Yes, that's what I think too,” says I.

For that was one of the things that I had figured out—only I called the second man an impersonator instead of a copy-cat. But they both meant the same thing.

“But what stumps me,” says Red, puzzled, “is why anybody should dress up like the professor and then tell us all that crazy stuff about green toenails.”

“Well, I don't know about the toenail part,” says I. “But I think I've got an important clew on the other. And it all goes right back to that old bathtub too. For you said yourself that it was the tub that the impersonator

was interested in. And now I know why. It's money he's after."

"What money?" says Red, puzzled. "What are you talking about?"

"Red," says I excitedly, "if we had known a week ago what I know now about that old tub, we could have got a hundred dollars for it."

"Sure," snorted Red, "and my uncle talks in his sleep too."

"No, honest, Red," I spoke earnestly. "That old tub is really worth a hundred dollars. And that guy on the hill knew it. That's why he wanted it, so he could sell it and get the money. But someone else got there ahead of him. At least that's how I got it figured out now."

"But where'd you get a hundred dollars for an old tub like that?" asked Red, still skeptical.

"Listen, boy!" says I, simply bubbling over with information. "That old tub was the very first bathtub ever manufactured by the Continental Bathtub Company—the better bathtub with the beautiful bulge! And they're wanting to buy it back now for a hundred dollars."

Then I told him about the letter. And just as I expected, he looked sick.

“A hundred dollars!” he squeaked weakly, with a look in his eyes that made me think of a drowning rat with a weight on its tail. “And we let it slip through our fingers! Oh, oh!” he suffered in the middle of Main street. “Fan me with a paving brick, before I ex-pire.”

“When I came home from College Hill last night,” says I, “I thought that the bathtub was gone for good. And so, when I read that letter, I felt just like you. Not a chance, I thought. And I even got into an argument over it with Mother. But after some hefty skull practice I’ve come to the conclusion that maybe the old tub isn’t gone for good after all. For that guy that we were talking to at the barn wants it, just as I said. And he wanted it when we talked to him last Sunday. For don’t you see how it all fits together, Red?” I asked excitedly. “We wondered at the time how he knew about the tub, and about us bringing it home in the rain, and Horse Foot going to sleep in it. You remember, Red—how we talked about that, and wondered about it.”

“We sure did,” he waggled.

“Well, that bird knew then what the tub was worth. And he already had made up his mind to steal it on us and collect the hundred dollars. And what did *we* do?—the prize boobs!

We asked him, just as sweet and innocent as you please, if we could *please* bring our tub up to his barn!—and it wasn't his barn at all. But he let on that it was, and said, oh, yes, we could bring the tub up!—and don't you remember how he sat down and laughed? Well, he was laughing at us. For there we were handing the tub right over to him. All he had to do was to wait for us to bring it up there to the barn and then go over and get it. Pretty soft for him, huh?"

"But, Jerry—" Red began, puzzled.

"Wait a minute," I shut him off. "I know what you're going to say. The tub was stolen on Monday night. And yet he called us up there last night to ask us about it. All right, I'm going to tell you about that in just a minute. For I think I've got it all figured out. But let's see first what he did. He went over to the barn on Monday night—the tub wasn't there. But maybe that was a little bit too early, he thought to himself, so he came back on Tuesday night—but it wasn't there then. He came back on Wednesday—and still no tub. By that time he was getting kind of anxious. So he calls me up Thursday, to get me up there, to find out why the tub wasn't there yet, and probably to hurry it along. But instead of hurry-

ing it along, he found out something he didn't know before—and that was that *someone else had stolen the tub ahead of him.*”

Red was pop-eyed now.

“Gee-miny crickets!” he cried. “You talk like a real detective.”

“Well, it wasn't hard to figure that out,” says I. “For the pieces all went together like a picture puzzle. That letter of Grandma Carey's was the piece of the puzzle that made the rest go together easy. Until then we kept wondering why anyone should steal our old bathtub. Now we know why. It was to get the hundred dollars. And I can tell you some more too,” I zipped right along.

“Boy!—you've got me dizzy already,” says Red, looking it. “But let's hear the rest of it.”

“The man I saw in the barn last Saturday night was a big man,” I spoke slowly and evenly. “And both the professor and the impersonator are big men. Which proves to me that it was the impersonator who tried to get our bathtub first. I mean the guy who dropped the hat. And the only reason why he didn't come back Sunday night again, was because he saw us that afternoon and expected us to innocently bring the tub up to him. Now,

doesn't that all fit together, Red? Now, tell me the truth. Don't you think so?"

"It sure does, Jerry. And while he was waiting on us, to bring the tub up there, the other guy—whoever he is—got in ahead of him. And he never knew anything about it till we told him last night."

"That's it exactly, Red. For don't you remember how mad he was? He showed it. And we wondered at it at the time. But it's all clear now. And the fact that he comes and goes so easy up there, further proves to me that he belongs up there."

"One of the students, huh?" Red followed me excitedly.

"Yes, or some criminal posing as a student," I nodded.

"But, Jerry!" Red spoke excitedly, as his own thoughts got to jumping along. "Maybe there isn't a copy-cat after all. Maybe it was that toenail professor himself, just acting two parts. Had you thought of that?"

"No, I don't think so," I spoke earnestly. "For I don't believe that a man in his position would take chances like that for a hundred dollars. For suppose he did do it, and it got out on him—one of the college's biggest professors chasing around nights stealing bathtubs

from kids! No, he wouldn't do that, Red."

"No, I guess not," Red conceded sensibly.

"Another thing," says I. "When you're around the real professor, he gives you a chill. You said that yourself. And I noticed it too. And I guess it's because he's so smart, or something. But the other man didn't make you feel that way. There was something boyish about him, particularly when he grinned, or laughed. So I think it's one of the students. And that's why he was spouting off that day about the pre-glacial period. He was up there practicing, to make his voice sound like the real professor's. And he couldn't very well do that if he wasn't around the professor every day, to learn his ways. So that almost *proves* that he's a student, and probably in one of the professor's classes too. Why, gosh!—*everything* fits together. Don't you think so, Red?"

"Yes, you got it worked out swell, Jerry. But tell me, why should a student go to all that trouble to make up like one of his professors? It wasn't to fool us. For we just stumbled onto him. Have you figured that out too?"

"Not for sure," says I. "But it looks to me as though he's after something bigger than that tub. That's why I said he may be a real criminal. And maybe he's planning to go down

to the bank and draw out the professor's money, or commit a crime of some kind."

"And shall we go up and tell the professor?" asked Red, excited.

"I don't think he'd believe us if we did, after what happened last night. I don't think we could make him believe anything, if we didn't have the proof right there to show him. But I know what we *can* do, Red," says I, "if you've got the grit. And it'll help our own case too."

"What?" says he, eager for the details.

"Well, I have a hunch that the impersonator knows where our tub is, even though he didn't get it himself. For if you'll remember, Red, he didn't seem so *surprised* when we told him it was gone. He seemed more *disappointed* and angry—as though he was sore that the other guy had got ahead of him."

"Yes, that's right, Jerry," Red agreed.

"All right then," I spoke daringly, "why can't we lay for him, and tap him on the head, just enough to stun him so we can get him tied up, and then make him tell us where the tub is?"

"Gee!" says Red, pop-eyed.

"I know it's risky," says I. "But if he's up to some other crooked work, as we think, it's

our *duty* to tap him on the head and capture him. In that way we'll find out what we want to know, and we'll have the proof right there for the professor. He won't have any chance then to make us feel like two cents. Instead, he'll be grateful to us for saving him from robbery, or something."

"But can't they put us in jail for hitting a man on the head?" asked Red anxiously.

"Well," I laughed, thinking back, "we never got put in jail the time we hit Bill Hadley on the head."

I told about that in my "Whispering Mummy" book.

"But we never got found out," says Red. "We were disguised like hunkies, with false mustaches and everything. And Bill thinks to this day that he was knocked out by a gang of real hunkies."

"All right then," says I quickly, "we'll do that over again, mustaches and all. Then, if there should be any kind of a slip, as there was in Bill's case, we can get away without anybody knowing who we really were. Or if everything works out as I think, we'll take the credit for it."

"Honest, Jerry!—you mean it?" Red asked, open-mouthed.

“Well, I will if you will,” I spoke daringly.

“And what are we going to crack him with?—ma’s stove-poker?”

“Well, it worked swell the other time,” I grinned.

“Oh, gee, Jerry!—I don’t think we ought to hit him that hard—not with a piece of iron.”

“Well, let’s use a broom handle then,” says I, “and just tap him enough to stun him.”

“Yes, I think that’s better,” says Red.

“We’ve seen him two times up there by the barn,” says I. “So I think he goes over there to practice. And that’s where we’ll lay for him,” I added.

“But who do you think it was, Jerry, who got the tub?—some other student?”

“That’s what we’re going to find out to-night,” says I.

“But not in the dark!” Red cried panicky.

“No, we’ll go up there right after school,” says I, “and do it all up in the daylight.”

“But let’s put some cloth on the broom handle, Jerry. For, gosh!—I don’t want to hurt him too bad.”

“A criminal like that deserves to be hurt,” says I grimly. “Besides, it’s our only way. And what’s a bump on the head! Boy!—I’ve been stunned like that a dozen times.”

Turning here, I suddenly noticed that Horse Foot was just a few feet behind us. He had been walking along just as easy as you please.

“S-s-say, Jerry,” he asked eagerly, “has your ma g-g-got——”

“No,” I cut in roughly, “she hasn’t got any old keys for you. And if you heard anything we said, and blab it, you’ll get your neck broke too.”

“P-p-pickled pigs feet,” says he, in his crazy way, with another of those odd laughs that I had noticed so much lately.

Then, as the last bell rang, we all ran into the schoolhouse.

CHAPTER XVIII

THE NOTE ON THE DOOR

RED and I got a broom handle of just about the right length and practiced up that noon in his barn. For a job like that had to be done right. And the only way to do it right was to practice up on it. So Red sat there with a padded kettle on his head while I slipped up behind him and socked him. The first time I socked him too hard, he said. It jarred his teeth, even with the padding on top. And the next time I was too light. But after a little bit I got it down just right. I knew just where to grip the broom handle, and how to raise it, and how fast to bring it down, and everything. So we were all set now, so far as that part was concerned.

Just before we finished up I had the feeling, that we all get at times, that we were being watched. And when I slipped outside, and looked around, there was Horse Foot with his nose in a crack. But he was only too glad to get away, and stay away, when we took to

practicing with the broom handle on the bottom side of his pants. Boy!—we made him squawk.

Then, after school, we met at Red's house, as planned, and got our disguises together, though it wasn't our plan to put them on till we were up by the old barn. First we got some long slouchy pants, just as we did in the "Mummy" story, then some slouch hats, and finally some bushy little mustaches that we made from an old fur piece of Red's ma's that we had cut into before for the same purpose. She had jawed the first time, but never had bothered to fix it, so we felt safe.

We had a big job ahead of us—laying out a man like that. And such a big man too! So to make ourselves just as strong and brawny as possible, we picked up a good lunch in the kitchen, starting with some bananas and ending with a peach pie that Red found tucked away in the pantry. I hesitated about the pie. For I knew how his mother had been talking. But he said there was another one in there. And he always got half the pie anyway at his house. So I helped him eat it.

Ready then for the deed, and feeling good and strong now, we made a bundle of our stuff, with the broom handle sticking out at both ends, and started out. We went along just as fast as

we could. And when we got there we put on our disguises in the bushes. Then, with me gripping the broom handle, we got down to wait for our victim.

The tower clock over at the college donged four-thirty, then a quarter of five, then five. That didn't look so good. It looked like we were going to be fooled. But we stuck, hopeful. And pretty soon—oh, boy!—we got our reward. For along came the impersonator, with his red wig on, and everything. And we saw now, as he got closer, that he even had a fake nose on. For the toenail professor had a terrible nose. It spread out all over his face. You don't see a nose like that very often. So, not having one like it himself, the impersonator had made himself one. But it was easy enough to see that it was false, and his bushy red hair too. And the wonder was to me that we ever had been fooled by it in the first place.

We thought, of course, that he'd start some more of that pre-glacial stuff. Instead he came along reading a book. And as though to help us all he could, he came over and sat down on a stump within twenty feet of us.

Boy!—everything was working lovely!

“Do you think you can get him now, Jerry?” whispered Red, his heart thumping.

“Sure,” says I confidently.

But I didn’t creep up on him right off. To tell you the truth I didn’t dare. For I suddenly realized what would happen to me if he turned and caught me before I could land on him. But I kept gritting my teeth and clenching my hands. And pretty soon I told Red I was ready. And I started to creep up.

“Remember,” Red whispered finally, “and don’t kill him.”

“I won’t,” says I.

He sat there reading as I got closer and closer to him. I was only six feet away now. Then three feet. Which was close enough. And without the slightest sound, except a gurgle from Red as he watched, I raised the broom handle, gripping it just as I would have to grip it to do a good job, and let it come down ker-smack!

In my excitement I guess I hit him harder than I intended. For down he went like a rock. And there he lay moaning. Gee! As I stood over him, I wished for a moment that I hadn’t done it. For it always looks bad when a man goes down like that. But I knew he’d be all right in a minute or two, except his head might thump some. And glad now that I *had* done

it, and had thus aided the law in putting an end to the evil practices of men like him, I got busy, with Red, and tied him up.

I took the legs while Red took the arms. For we had to work fast. But it was done in just a few seconds. For we had practiced that too. All it took was a few quick flips of the ropes, and a couple of hard knots. And there he was, completely at our mercy.

"You talk to him, Jerry, when he wakes up," panted Red.

"O-k," says I.

"But remember—make your voice gruff, like a man's."

"How's that?" I gave him a sample.

"Swell," says he. "But don't wiggle your nose too much or your mustache'll drop off."

"It tickles," says I.

"Well, don't do *that*," Red cautioned quickly. "For it's almost off now."

So I fixed it.

"Boy!" says I, as we waited. "I hope we get that tub back."

"You and me both," says Red.

"We'll make him tell us who took it, and where it is. And then we'll turn him over to the professor."

“But how are we going to get him over there?” asked Red. “Gosh!—we can’t carry him that far.”

“We’ll make him walk, with his hands still tied behind him. Or if he won’t do that, we’ll double-tie him and bring the professor over here. Then they can do what they want to with him.”

Red bent over.

“Let’s yank his wig off,” says he. “For I want to see what he looks like in his own hair.”

“All right,” says I. “And while you’re doing that I’ll yank off his false nose.”

“Boy!—some nose!” says Red, looking at it. “What do you think it is, Jerry?—putty?”

“Yes, or paper,” says I.

“Well, here goes,” says Red, getting ready to yank.

I got ready too. But when he yanked on the hair, and I yanked on the big nose, they didn’t come off. They weren’t false at all! They were real!

Suffering cats! We had knocked out the wrong guy! And if you ever saw two dumb-looking and scared-looking kids, it was us. And I don’t mean maybe.

He was groaning louder now, and stirring. In another minute he’d be up looking around,

with his senses all back. And while we could have taken that minute to untie him again, so that he could go off without further harm to himself, we figured we better use the time ourselves, and get away, before he saw us. We didn't want him to see us even in our disguises.

We got back in the bushes out of sight. And as we watched, we saw him struggle, moaning dully, to a sitting position. He tried to raise his hands to his head, but couldn't. And then, as he found out how he was tied up at both ends, and his full senses came back with a rush, he screeched bloody-murder.

"Help! Help!" he screeched.

A small figure came into sight running. It was Horse Foot!

"W-w-what's the matter?" he asked the screeching professor, as he stopped beside him.

"Run to the college quick and get help," cried the professor, as he struggled uselessly with the ropes. "For I have been attacked by some ruffians, and robbed."

"'Tacked by w-w-who?" asked Horse Foot, without moving from the spot.

"Some ruffians. I sat reading, on that stump. And they crept up behind me and struck me down. Then they robbed me and tied me up. But go now, and get help."

"I c-c-can help," says Horse Foot practically.

And whipping out a pocketknife he cut the ropes with two quick slashes.

"I b-b-bet I know who did it," he then told the professor, who, after getting to his feet, now leaned weakly against a tree.

"Then you saw them getting away?" the professor asked dizzily.

"S-s-sure," Horse Foot pointed off into the country. "They went that way."

The professor was going through his pockets now, a bit surprised.

"Why! How strange," says he wonderingly, as he found his money all there. "My wallet is intact. I—I don't seem to be minus a thing."

He hadn't noticed a key drop. But Horse Foot had. And in a flash it disappeared into his pocket.

"Well, you b-b-better go now," he advised, "before they g-g-get back."

"Yes, yes," cried the professor nervously. "But let me take your arm, my boy, for I still feel giddy."

Just before they got out of sight Horse Foot turned and yelled "pickled pigs feet." Which, of course, was a signal to us. And knowing then that he had seen everything that had happened, and had made up the story of the fleeing

robbers to help us, we got out of our disguises and ran the other way for home.

“Boy!” says Red, as we came miserably into town. “Now we *are* in a mess.”

“Yes,” I spoke quickly, “but don’t you worry about it, Red. For I’ll take all the blame, if we get caught. For it was my idea in the first place. And it was me who knocked him out.”

But Red, the good kid, wouldn’t have it that way a-tall. It was fifty-fifty when we started out, he said sturdily, and it would be fifty-fifty to the end, no matter whether it was one hundred dollars or one hundred days in jail.

Everything was dark at my house. And when I went in, I found a note from Mother saying that she and Dad had gone to Ashton on business and might even spend the night there with friends. Which was a big relief to me. For I had dreaded facing them. I felt like a chump. And I hated to think that maybe I had gotten them into trouble.

Red came over after supper and we started for the picture show.

“I thought I better get out of the house as soon as I could,” he laughed. “For ma had company for supper. She’s entertaining the whole choir. And, boy!—did *I* get the dirty looks when she brought in the peach pie. For

the pieces were so small we almost needed a magnifying glass to find them."

"And did your pa say anything?" I asked anxiously, more interested in that.

"No," Red shook his head. "Everything's jake at our house except for the peach pie. And I suppose I'll hear about that now for the next six months."

We met Jane Rail coming out of a drug store.

"Sammy took your roller skates," she tattled to me.

"Where is he?" I asked quickly. "I want to see him."

"Well, you can't see him to-night," says she.

"Why? Won't your ma let him out?"

"He's gone."

"Gone where?" I asked.

"Well, if you'd read the college news," says she, with a lofty air, "you'd find out."

And with that she went off importantly toward home.

"I wonder what she meant by that," says I curiously. "For you don't suppose they're putting Horse Foot's name in the college news, do you?"

"Well, he's a mascot," laughed Red. "For you told me so yourself."

"I think it's just some of her big talk,"

says I, dismissing the matter from my mind.

It was a little bit early for the picture show. So Red and I stopped in a couple of restaurants to see if we could hear anything about Professor Van Gorder getting socked on the head. But all we heard was politics and football scores, which helped our case a lot.

"If Horse Foot just keeps his mouth shut," Red says hopefully, "maybe we'll come out all right yet."

"Yes," says I, "that's what I wanted to see him about. For I've got a lot of stuff he wants. And I think I can make a deal with him."

The picture show was so good that we stayed to see it twice. So it was after eleven when we finally got out.

"See you in the morning," I told Red, as he dropped off at his house.

"Or in jail," he laughed.

But he didn't mean it.

I had the front door key. And eager now to get to bed, I started fumbling around for the key-hole, but stopped, when a paper pinned to the door, fluttered in my face.

When I got it inside, by a light, I found, as I expected, that it was another secret message from "The Owl."

CHAPTER XIX

CONCLUSION

I got Red on the phone, before he got to bed, and got him over there.

“What’s the matter?” he cried, as he tumbled in big-eyed. “What happened, Jerry?”

“Look at that!” says I, handing him the note from the door.

Here it is:

Taem em ta eht nrab ta dim etin.

Eht Lwo.

“It’s a note from Horse Foot,” says I excitedly. “I found it on the front door. And he’s got everything spelt backwards. For don’t you remember how he spelt barn in that other note? And look at that,” I pointed to the same word in the new note. “He wants us to meet him at the old barn at midnight.”

But Red couldn’t believe that.

“I bet it’s a joke,” says he. “For his folks

wouldn't let him go up there at midnight. Besides, what would he go up there for?"

"I don't know, Red," I spoke breathlessly. "But he's up to something. He's been at it for a week—grabbing keys and running off with them some place. He's been trying to unlock *something*. But I'll be dog-goned if I know what it is or where it is. And then to-night he went off with my roller skates. For you heard what Jane said."

"Yes, and what else was it she said, Jerry—about the newspaper?"

"That's right," says I quickly.

And grabbing the evening newspaper I started through it.

"Look for the college news," I told Red.

"Here's something about a basketball game," says he.

"Let me see," says I, and I went down through it line by line.

"Find anything?" asked Red.

"Yes, here it is. Listen!—I'll read it: 'So with this fine record behind them, the college quintet is confident of another easy victory to-night when they meet the Bloomington Normals on their own floor. A large delegation of rooters is going down, the cars leaving the campus at six o'clock, and included in the merry

party will be one of our own small boys, Sammy Rail, the team mascot.' "

"Well, I'll be cow-kicked," says Red, when I finished. "I never dreamed they'd take *him* along to a game. I thought they were just kidding him, to make him feel good."

I looked at the newspaper, and then I looked at the note.

"He can't be both places," says I, bewildered.

"The little smart aleck!" Red growled darkly. "He went off to have a good time himself, and thought he could play a trick on us, and get us up there in the middle of the night."

"I don't believe it," says I slowly. "And I don't believe it's a joke. For Horse Foot has been planning this for days. He knew the team was going away to-night, and he let on to them that he was going with them. That's how it got in the paper. But I bet you anything you want to bet, Red, that when the team pulled out to-night, he stayed behind on purpose. And I bet you further that he's up there at that old barn."

"Well, you needn't look at me that way," screeched Red, wild-eyed. "For I'm not going up there. And you needn't start coaxing either. So you just keep away from me."

"Come on," says I, shoving him a flashlight, "and quit acting so silly."

"No, I won't," he stood stubbornly.

"All right then," says I, starting around him, "I'll go alone."

"You're crazy," says he.

"Maybe I am," says I quietly. "But if he can stand it up there by himself I guess I can."

"Oh, Jerry!" Red began to whimper. "I don't want to go."

"I don't either," I confessed. "It gives me the cold shivers just to think of it. But I'm going just the same. For that kid's finally got something up there that he's been after for a week. It's something he had to get keys for, to let out. And I want to know what it is."

"Oh, gee! I wish I'd got to bed before you called."

"No, you don't," says I shortly. "So quit bluffing about it, and turn out that light."

"But aren't you going to get his pa, Jerry? —or anybody else?"

"This is a kid's job, Red. A kid started it, and we're going to help finish it. So come on."

"But what if it's some animal, or something, that he's turning loose?"

"Well, I don't know what it is," says I, as

we locked the door and started off in the dark. "But as long as he isn't afraid of it, I don't know why we should be."

"Just the same," says Red, "I wish I knew what it was. I'd feel safer."

"I felt from the first," says I, "that there was some queer secret about that old barn. That's why it scared me so, I guess."

"Well, don't talk about it now," says Red, as for the second time that day we hurried out of town on the Treebury Pike and up through Happy Hollow, the scattered homes of which were all in darkness now. "Gosh! I've got goose pimples on me as big as acorns."

"Horse Foot must have found something in the barn that we overlooked," says I, thoughtfully. "Something that had to be unlocked. But I still can't imagine what it is."

"Well, quit talking about it, I tell you," quavered Red. "Gosh!—you make a fellow go up there. And then you try to scare the wits out of him all the way up."

"Maybe it's money!" says I, big-eyed now. "A whole chest full of money!"

"Or a rattlesnake," shivered Red.

"But where do the skates come in?" I puzzled. "He had a pair of his own. Yet he took

mine. What in the world is he going to do with them?"

"Say, can't you work your feet without working your jaw too? We're going up there to find out what it is. So shut up till we get there."

The tower clock donged a quarter of twelve as we struck the top of the hill and started down the line fence. And soon, up ahead of us, we caught the squatty black outline of the old barn.

We went up by inches then, scarcely breathing. And at the barn we went around carefully, expecting to find an open door or window. But it was all locked up, and boarded up, just as we had left it. And the inside was like a tomb.

"Horse Foot!" I called softly. But there was no answer. And by that time, I want to tell you, I was scared clear through. For that was the scariest thing that *I* ever got into. And more than ever I had the terrible feeling that the barn was moving toward me and getting ready, like some tremendous living thing, to pounce on me.

Which, of course, was all imagination. For the barn never moved. Nor did it give out a single alarming sound. But maybe it was the

awful silence around it that helped to give me that feeling about it.

The minutes dragged as we hung together shivering. Then the clock began to strike. Midnight! And Horse Foot had told us to meet him here at midnight!

Dong! . . . Dong! . . . Dong! . . .

Red and I counted the strokes together.

Dong! . . . Dong! . . . Dong! . . .

And it kept on twelve times. Then the metallic sound slowly died away.

Off toward the college we heard another sound then. All I could think of was something floundering along on the ground. Then something creaked. Then the other sound came again.

And then—oh, boy, were we ever glad to hear it!—we heard Horse Foot sneeze.

He was almost to us now. And as we turned our lights on him, there he was, pulling for all that was in him. And behind him, on the roller skates, was the Buffalo Bill bathtub!

“H-h-help yourself,” says he, when we got to him. And then he sat down completely tucked out, but happy.

Which leaves me with very little more to tell. For my story started with the finding of the old tub on the town dump-pile, and now it ends

with the tub's recovery. And little Horse Foot, as usual, was the hero!

It took us till two o'clock to get the tub home. For it's no easy trick, as Horse Foot found out, to pull a bathtub on roller skates. For skates never were intended for that. But we managed it, after two hours of hard work. And this time, let me tell you, the old tub was put away safely under lock and key, while we rolled into bed together for some needed sleep.

Later the tub, which still had the name and number on the bottom, was shipped to Cincinnati, and a few days later we got a check for one hundred dollars. Red and I had planned to split the money between us, if we ever got it. But after what Horse Foot had done we figured that he ought to have a share too. For we might never have got the tub back without him. So we each got a third. And from my share I bought Mother a two-dollar box of candy, and Dad some bedroom slippers. Then, with Mother's help, I bought Grandma Carey everything she needed for a new dress, the cloth, thread, trimming and all. And when I gave it to her she kissed me! But that was all right. I was so happy over the way things had worked out that I was willing to let anybody kiss me who wanted to, even that toenail pro-

fessor, who, by the way, not wanting to get his name in the paper, never reported his attack. And with Horse Foot a better pal of mine than ever, Red and I feel perfectly safe on that score. It's a secret among us three boys. For as long as we got out of it all right, and had learned our lesson, we couldn't see the sense of confessing everything to our parents, and worrying them.

Well, so much for that. We got the tub back, and got the money for it, and what I didn't spend, of my share, I put in the bank. And to this day Horse Foot's parents think that he went to Bloomington with the students. Mrs. Rail was perfectly thrilled. It was *such* a relief to her, she told Mother, that Sammy was going in such intellectual company. But all Horse Foot hung around the students for was to get that tub back, as I'll tell you in a moment.

But first I'm going to tell you who took the tub, and why.

The students, in the dormitory that Horse Foot had pointed out to me, had split up into two sides, the Sunny-siders, south of the main hall, and the Shady-siders, on the north side. And ever since school had started, in Septem-

ber, they had been trying to see who could collect the most old junk. Each side had a room where they kept the stuff locked up. If one side brought in a barber pole, the other side brought in a barber pole. In the same way they picked up gates, street signs, step-ladders, fire buckets, and every other old thing. On the Saturday night that we watched in the barn, one of the Sunny-siders happened to be in a restaurant when Mr. Rail was telling laughingly about us finding an old bathtub, and how his little boy had gone to sleep in it, in the rain. A bathtub! Here was something, the Sunny-sider told himself gleefully, that the other side couldn't duplicate—and finding out where the tub was he tried to snatch it on us, as described, but had to run off without his hat instead when we tripped him up. Then, just as I had figured out, he had planned to come back Sunday night, but changed his plans, highly amused, after his talk with us Sunday afternoon. For he was the impersonator—a swell fellow, and not a crook at all. (My first mistake!) His name was Harold Hembone, from Chicago, nicknamed Hambone. He and some more students were getting up a play in which he had to impersonate Professor Van Gorder, which ex-

plains about the disguise and the practicing.

If you'll go back to the part where we first met him, on the hill, you'll see that Horse Foot mentioned a wig. But we never thought anything of that at the time, nor the amused student either. But Horse Foot had seen the student take off his wig and rearrange it, before we got there.

On Monday night, when we were running through the neighborhood in search of Mrs. Meyers, to get the bath-room key, Horse Foot saw Hambone down town, and got in with him. That was the night that Horse Foot went up there to supper, and later went over to the old barn where we found him and brought him home. While with the students he learned about the two "trophy" rooms, and was there, mind you, when the triumphant Shady-siders came in with our old bathtub, which they had just taken from Red's back porch. Horse Foot saw them lock the tub up, which was the beginning of his search for keys. For what he wanted was a key to unlock that particular door, and not something in the barn, as I had suspected. (My second mistake!) Having gotten in with the students, he could run in and out as he pleased, without attracting suspicious attention. But he had a hard time finding a

suitable key. That key of Professor Van Gorder's, though, did the trick.

Horse Foot had told the students that he would go with them to Bloomington. But at the last moment he let on that he was sick. So they went off without him, which made it easy for him to get to the tub in the almost deserted dormitory. His folks thought he was going with the students, so experienced no worry about him at bed-time. Knowing of our plans to build the bath-house in the old barn, he thought we'd want the tub there, so told us to meet him there at midnight. At the dormitory he got into the Shady-siders' trophy room, and waited there till the few remaining students were sound asleep. Then, strapping the roller skates on the four legs of the bathtub (he had thought of that early!), he pulled it guardedly into the hall and finally got it outside. And the rest you know. He felt big in doing it all alone, which may have been a mistake, and he may not have been fair with us in keeping all he knew to himself, but he did it anyway, in his odd way. It's his way, and I suppose he'll always be that way. But just the same he's a swell little kid.

And the green toenails? Well, that was just some nonsense of Hambone's. For he knew

how dignified Professor Van Gorder was, and thought it would be funny to have us go over there and say that. But he never expected that it would interfere in any way with his own plans. For he thought we'd get the tub up there on Monday night. But it wasn't till Thursday night that he learned that the tub, brought in by the Shady-siders, was the same tub that he was after.

I'll always wonder if we could have made a success of our bathtub business. But, as I told Red, a bird in the hand was worth two in the bush. So we took the hundred dollars, and were mighty glad to get it.

Mrs. Meyers was so happy over our good fortune that she forgot to scold about the peach pie. But, boy!—did *we* catch it one day later when she discovered that we had cut another hunk out of her fur piece.

“Just look at that!” she went with it indignantly to her husband.

“Moths?” he asked, unconcerned.

“Moths nothing!” she stormed. “It’s that young son of yours. He’s been making himself some more false whiskers. And out of his great-grandmother’s fur muff too!—the very same muff that she wore to England the time she met Queen Victoria.”

“Met Queen Victoria!” snorted Mr. Meyers. “You’re telling me.”

“Well, she saw her riding by in a fancy buggy anyway, going to church or something. And that’s just the same as meeting her—for the queen waved to her.”

“Yes,” yawned Mr. Meyers, “and one time I met Colonel Lindbergh too, going over me in an airplane.”

And that’s all!

But I’ll be back again soon, and the whole gang with me, in another new book, JERRY TODD’S UP-THE-LADDER CLUB.

One night when we were up in our new club-room, in Red’s barn, and he had just finished telling us how he was going to get a goat for initiation, we got a phone call from Grandma Carey, asking us to come out there right away. Someone was peeping in her windows, she said. And when we got there, through the snow, she told us a strange story about something, with spooks in it, that had happened to her when she was a girl. Later we followed the tracks in the snow and met the queer parrot woman who made them. Then, even stranger, we found that someone was secretly sleeping in our club-room nights, after we left. But who it was, and what the parrot woman’s purpose was in doing

all those weird bewildering things, is the new story that I'm going to let you read for yourself.

U.T.L.C. That means "Up-the-ladder club." And you'll get the story soon, the goat, the crazy initiation, the mysterious parrot woman, the other mysterious person, the fun and everything else.

I'll be seein' you then!

THE END

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The winking lights flashing from the old tower on the grounds of the Bonds' new home defy explanation. There is no one in the tower—and no electric power or connections! Had the engaging circus family that Carol befriended anything to do with the mystery? And what interest had Parsnips, the queer old farmer, in the "ghost" tower?

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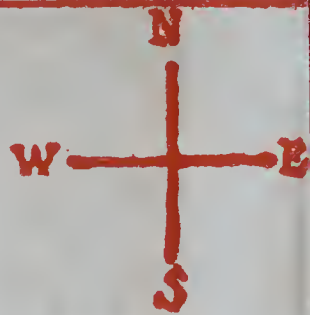
Publishers

NEW YORK



MAP OF

Road to Ashtown →



Depot



Chicago and Rock Island R.R.

Street

Poppy's
Plekle
Parlor.

Street

Factory district

Main

Street

Street

Stores

Church

Canal

Old
Carriage factory



School Street

Hill

Stores

Tutter
Times



Jewelry
store



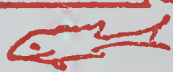
Grant St.

Poppy's
home



Elm St.

Canal



To Ashtown



TUTTER

ILLINOIS

